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The socialization of adolescent youth in conflict : crossing texts, crossing contexts, crossing the line.

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THE SOCIALIZATION OF ADOLESCENT YOUTH IN CONFLICT: CROSSING TEXTS, CROSSING CONTEXTS, CROSSING THE LINE

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

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The study takes a grounded theoretical approach to the study of conflicted communication among adolescent youth in an inner city middle school. Ethnographic field methods were utilized over an eighteen month period in an inner city middle school and the surrounding neighborhoods. Conflicted communication is concerned with the use of patterned forms and content of conflict behaviors to both maintain and transform the youths' social world. It arises out of the social construction of adolescence, the institutional and community settings and familial practices.

Three questions are posed: What are the patterned forms and content of adolescent conflicted communication? How does the school, community, and family make an impact on conflicted communication? What does the enactment of conflicted communication reveal about the social world of adolescent youth?

Audiotapes of mediation sessions between youth, interviews with youth, school personnel, community members

and families, as well as field notes comprise the primary data sources. Analyses of these data necessarily cross traditional boundaries to explore these research questions. Descriptive analyses reveal the presence of overarching patterned processes and particular repeated content in conflict situations. An interpretive analysis of 'face,' an often-mentioned symbolic theme, reveals the importance of taking the symbolic dimension into account in order to understand the hidden values inherent in conflicted communication practices. Lastly, a critical analysis examines the interplay between conflicted communication practices and the influence of the inner city institution and neighborhoods on such practices. Framing these three analyses is a meta-theoretical proposition regarding the social world of adolescent youth which suggests that adolescent youth engage in conflicted communication because it provides the means to re-organize social groupings, to experiment with displays and exercise of power, and to test the strength of socio-familial alliances.

The study concludes with the suggestion that conflict resolution/mediation programs in schools consider the socio-cultural dimensions and functions of conflict in the lives of adolescents. Rather than striving to eliminate institutional conflict, school personnel need to encourage critical reflection about conflicted communication and help youth identify junctures within conflict situations where less destructive actions might be chosen.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

Little empirical work is available which details the particular patterned forms and content of conflicted communication among adolescents. This study presents the findings of fourteen months of ethnographic research at Walnut Middle School located in an inner city in an eastern state. The primary participants included the more than two hundred students who took part in mediation sessions.

The term conflicted communication is used because it delimits the typical assumptions associated with conflict by focusing on the idea that, at the heart of youth conflict episodes, is a system of communication which follows verbal and nonverbal rules of interaction.

While there are instances of misperceived communication, i.e., miscommunication which results from misperceptions and therefore results in misinterpretations of behavior, a good deal of interaction cannot be categorized thus. What often transpires is, rather, part of a complex social system which specifically allows youth to form and re-form social identity groups, to strengthen family ties and to experiment with the exercise of power. What presents itself in this system is often manipulative communication, whereby an individual uses particular behaviors to steer a conflict episode, thus extending or protracting it for his or her own purposes.

The conflicted communication of Walnut youth is systematic to the extent that it exhibits distinct patterns and content which are observable and, to a great extent, predictable. The adolescent conflicted communication system is stable as well, re-creating itself as it is transferred from one generation to the next, from one grade of students to the upcoming grades.

But this view of conflict as a system of communication must also allow for those qualities which promote the transformation and renewal of the system. Youth conflicted communication exhibits a characteristic dynamism. Although a generic model of an over-riding dominant patterned form of conflict can be identified, myriad variations in the scope and sequence of this form are available to participants, as well as variant social configurings of groups.

This dynamism is linked to two other characteristics of youth conflicted communication--unpredictability and irregularity. Because human beings have the potential to make various decisions and choices, no conflict sequence, scope or alignment of participants[1] can be taken for granted. It is because of this capacity to diverge from the expected or normed (what some might call irrationality) that conflicted communication is both unpredictable and irregular.

In addition, youth conflicted communication is both culture[2]-general since patterned forms and content are

available to and are used by a diverse array of students and culture-specific because there are discernible ethnic and class forms and content. Youth conflicted communication is both gender-generic in that girls and boys exhibit similar behaviors for similar reasons and gender-specific because there are distinctive and noticeable differences between young females and young males in conflict.

Within this current study, the focus is on illuminating the broader general generic forms and content. These forms and content are artifacts of the interface between the school culture[3] and the conflict traditions youth have established in school and which they encounter in many of their neighborhoods. Culture-specific data are not addressed (for a variety of reasons which are discussed in the Limitations section). Gender-generic and some gender-specific behaviors, however, are presented.

It is noteworthy that youth conflicted communication is also a product of the developmental fact of adolescence. As such, the content of conflict episodes is, at times, distinctly adolescent[4]. The sparse ethnographic literature available on United States' youth conflict indicates that adolescents engage in similar behaviors and react to similar stimuli which are unique to their particular age group, regardless of their ecological environment, socio-economic status or school culture.

Figure 1 (Factors Affecting the Adolescent Conflicted Communication System) demonstrates the various realms which bring their influence to bear on adolescent conflict practices. Social-environmental structures, specifically, the family, the neighborhood and the school, not to mention the individual's own psychology and adolescence all contribute to the shape, the scope and the content of youth conflicted communication at Walnut Middle School.

Rationale for the Study

As was mentioned earlier, the availability of ethnographic studies of youth conflict carried out either in the United States or abroad is extremely limited. Therefore, this study was conducted in a naturalistic setting with several aims in mind: to construct a meta-theoretical analysis of youth conflict, to develop baseline procedural models of ongoing youth conflict and describe the content of conflict, and to demonstrate the connections between youth conflicted communication and societal structures. All of these aims have implications for the effectiveness of conflict resolution programming.

Social Meta-Theory

The term, meta-theory, is used to denote a particular level of theory generation--development of a super-social theory of youth conflict--which accommodates sense-making

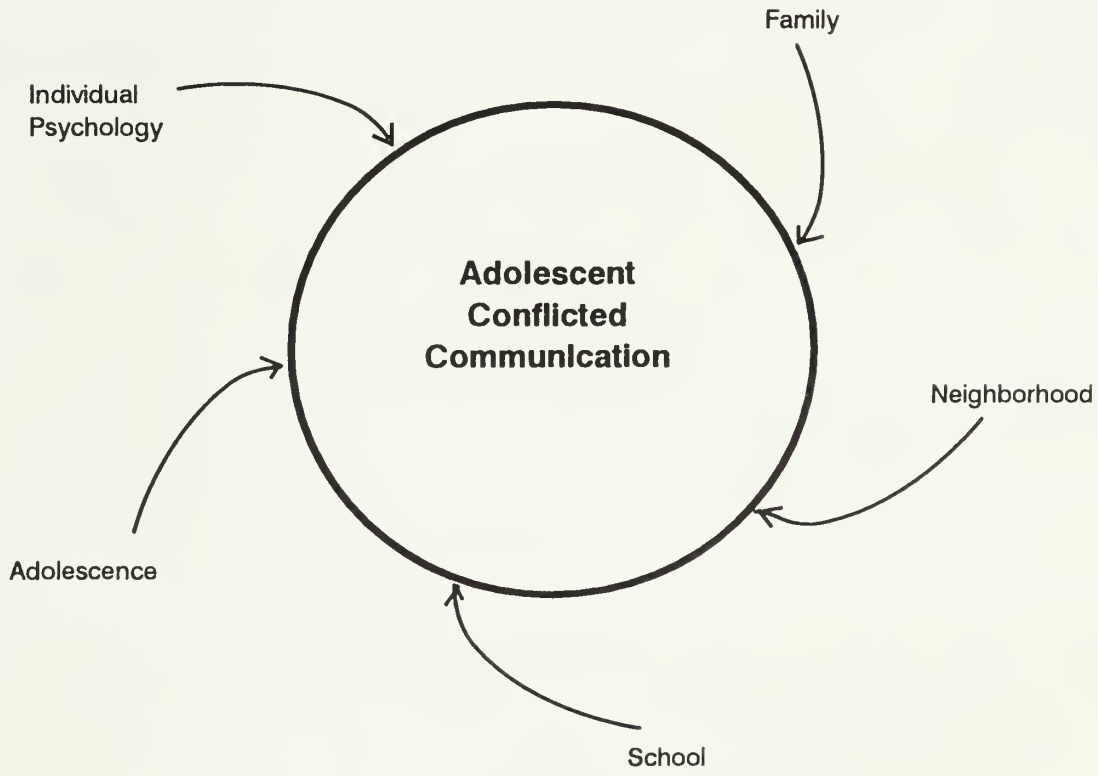

Figure 1 Factors Affecting the Adolescent Conflicted Communication System

between local settings and identifies points of juncture between the local and the macro level. This meta-theory, for lack of a better term, identifies the place of conflicted communication in the social world of the participants in my study. It provides a new way of grounding complex conflict behaviors in a social realm.

The social meta-theory was only able to emerge as a consequence of covering the three analytical fields explored in this study--the descriptive, the interpretive and the critical. In other words, as I endeavored to connect the descriptive pattern and content findings to broader structural, cultural and developmental domains by proposing that individual practices are linked to larger systems, the social meta-theory emerged. The meta-theory in turn provides the undergirding for the generation of theory which has to do with conflict procedure and content.

Descriptive Analytical Field: Why Identify Patterned Forms and Content?

Since very limited literature is available which addresses the actual conflict processes and content of youth conflict, this study establishes baseline descriptive findings based on data gathered within a particular institution. Educational programming often occurs in the absence of research on and knowledge of how and why children engage in certain actions and behaviors; projects are thus often in grave danger of placing the programmatic cart before the empirical horse.

In those school settings where the diversity--economic, cultural and developmental--of the student body challenges assumptions and mainstream approaches, contemporary research has been pivotal in making a contribution to the transformation of education endeavors[5]. It is not unusual for the research study and the transformative practices to walk hand in hand and side by side; the need for change is frequently pressing and time for in-depth longitudinal study is often a wistful luxury. This study is intended to help inform practice in mediation and conflict resolution programs.

Contributions of the Study

When a new body of educational literature began to emerge in the 1970s as research studies moved away from predominantly quantitative methods which relied exclusively on statistical data to explain educational phenomena, not surprisingly there was also a movement away from the framing of issues in psychological terms. The trend was toward analyzing the socio-cultural and economic components of education (Ogbu, 1982) as well as the effects of the group on an individual's actions (McDermott & Hood, 1982).

Qualitative methods provided a vehicle for asking questions and exploring phenomena which, for obvious reasons, had been ignored in quantitative, psychologically-framed research. Presently, qualitative studies are helping to illustrate what is becoming passé (at least in

some circles): that very little can or should be presumed about an individual's behavior on the basis of psychologically framed statistical measures alone.

Acceptance or, at the very least, acknowledgement, of this statement is imperative if one is interested in countering "the hegemony of educational psychology in our language of education" (McDermott & Hood, 1982, p. 100) and in researching education in order to broaden and deepen our understanding of the students within our schools and how best to serve them.

This shift, or expansion, if you will, in the foundations of educational research has occasioned a second acknowledgement--that few assumptions about what is normal can be carried from the dominant mainstream middle-class culture into settings which are culturally and socio-economically diverse. Even generalizations about intra-group behavior need to be illuminated by examples of the behavior of individuals within the group, especially in a complex, post-industrial, multicultural society such as the United States.

Assumptions about the stasis of group identity and coherence must be questioned (Spindler & Spindler, 1987) and examined. Group identity boundaries are much more fluid and permeable than has been depicted previously (Vasquez, Pease-Alvarez, & Shannon, 1994). Gordon-Popatia (1993) has demonstrated the chameleon-like nature of individuals' definitions of cultural and social self-

identity in Canadian multicultural society. New immigrant and refugee individuals in Gordon-Popatia's study were aware of the need to alter or subordinate internalized home culture ways of doing and being depending upon the group context in which they found themselves. Among the youth Gordon interviewed, this alteration of home culture patterns occurred with intention and awareness.

One of the more popular ways of conducting research in such fluid multicultural settings is through the use of ethnographic methods. According to Spradley, "ethnography yields empirical data about the lives of people in specific situations. It allows us to see alternative realities and modify our culture-bound theories of human behavior" (1980, p. 16). The field of education has borrowed ethnography from cultural anthropology and applied it to the school setting (Spindler, 1982; Spindler & Spindler, 1987). Consequently, the ethnography of schooling has facilitated the broadening of educational research from experimental, psychological designs to qualitative designs which focus on the nature of the socio-cultural realm.

The ethnographic framework resonates with the work of symbolic interactionists (Mead, 1913; Burkitt, 1991). Indeed, Burkitt goes so far as to state that "individuals are determined in every fibre of their being by the cultural system and the symbolic realm it generates" (1991, p. 191). But while classical symbolic interaction theory locates culture exclusively within the individual--thus

bringing upon symbolic interaction the same criticism which is aimed at traditional educational psychological theory--Burkitt extends this positioning and emphasizes critical analyses which examine historical and structural aspects of cultural systems and the individuals who are determined by them.

Burkitt has outlined one gap in qualitative social science research--the lack of analytical interplay between the individual and the larger system; but a different sort of gap exists between macro-level and micro-level qualitative studies in education. Macro-level studies do utilize the sort of critical framework Burkitt advocates in order to examine structural constraints which impede certain groups' progress within the education system.

Most of this research has to do with a class analysis of educational failure (Fine, 1991; Willis, 1977; McLaren, 1980, 1986; Maruyama, 1992). There is a lamentable absence of such studies which focus on analyses of race and gender (however problematic these concepts themselves may be) within the educational setting (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985; Barona & Garcia, 1990). In addition, these macro-level studies tend to sacrifice the 'human factor'--those unique individual and inter- and intra-group variations in responses which give social and cultural boundaries their permeability. Generalizations can emerge from macro-level studies which dull our sensitivity to individual variation and difference.

At the opposite end of the spectrum are micro-level studies which focus on happenings within a given classroom, generally between a group of students and a teacher (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985). These studies cover a wide variety of topics from analyses of reading and writing practices (Solsken, 1993) to classroom management, discipline and power (Plax, Kearney, McCroskey, Richmond, 1986). The criticism levelled at micro-level studies is that they, in their turn, often sacrifice the larger picture. There is little research which pulls these disparate glimpses of the macro and micro lives of schools together into a coherent picture of a variegated education system.

Consequently, what transpires between the margins of these two broad areas of research--the macro and the micro--and how the two areas interact to re-create each other has not been adequately explored. Relatively few research endeavors attempt to flesh out the connections between classroom, home, community and structures. And, while such studies do exist (Ogbu, 1974, 1982; Philips, 1983; Macias, 1984, 1987; Fine, 1991), there is a great need for more work to be done in a wide variety of settings.

When one looks specifically at the subfield of youth conflict, those studies which avoid the psychological trap of locating conflict behavior exclusively within the control of the individual tend also to use a critical theory framework. The emphasis is placed on making sense

of macro-level structural systems (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985) and the manner in which these systems control groups' options.

Such studies are vital to the paradigm shifts which push our understanding of the interconnections between actions, events, groups and systems beyond the confines of the psychological framework. Yet, again, the criticism levelled at these studies is that they generally sacrifice the essential human factor necessary for understanding individual actions and choices.

Looking outside of the field of education toward conflict studies, one finds that the 1970s produced a great deal of sociological literature which explored inter-ethnic group conflict[6]. Indeed, this topic continues to capture researchers' interest today. But we would do better not to confine our analyses exclusively to a sociological approach to understanding why groups engage in conflict which--due to the demands of sociological methodology--tends to support the traditional perception that group identity is bounded and non-transmutable.

An argument needs to be made for expanding our discussion to include a critical analysis of the ways in which groups and individuals across groups within a multicultural setting such as the United States are alike as well as different in their conflict behaviors. This allows us to shift from a single-minded emphasis on inter-group conflicts to an emphasis on discovering the diverse

ways in which inter-group views and behaviors may actually be rooted in similar soil.

As school populations become increasingly diverse, students will continue to bring their own ways of doing and being with them into classrooms and corridors. Home and community norms and mores will not be left at the door of the school, if, indeed, they ever really have been. Highlighting conflict norms, patterns and mores as well as accepting that students do not shed their acquired ways of expressing conflict when they step into school requires the extension of educational research beyond the school doors. A critical orientation to an ethnographic study of conflict can help shift the focus on inter-group conflict toward a comparative analysis of group and individual patterns of conflict similarity and difference as they are mediated by broader social structures.

Ethnography can also help to fill another gap which exists in conflict studies as well as in educational research: the observation of behavior in natural settings in order to literally and figuratively flesh out our understandings of conflict behaviors[7]. Through the use of a research methodology which relies heavily on personal contact, the voices of individuals who represent a spectrum of conflict behaviors can become audible. By understanding individual variation within a group, we are better able to dissolve stereotypes as our understanding of the complexity of the group itself increases.

Finally, with respect to the focused study of conflict, a great deal more integrative work is needed across and within ethnic and economic groups, a fact which is true for other areas of educational ethnography as well (Gibson, 1982, p. 25). A good deal more work is also needed to broaden the conceptualization and investigation of conflict as events (such as an argument) in isolation to conflict as a fluid, patterned and coordinated system of contextual actions and reactions which are influenced by individual psychology, family, ethnic and neighborhood norms and forms, and institutional setting.

Limitations of the Research Study

The limitations of this study are found in two domains: the design of the research study and the capabilities of the researcher. The following sub-sections address specific limitations within each of these domains.

Limitations of the Research Design

The study is limited in several respects. First, the design was intentionally broad-focused and did not target a specific ethnic/racial group or gender group as the primary participants in the study. Accommodating such specificity was beyond the design and scope of this research project and would have perhaps even have been counter-productive since many youth indicated attachment to a number of identity groups[8]. Consequently, the theoretical constructs

which emerged are based on my contact with a representative cross-section of the school population which I encountered mainly in the school mediation office.

If I had been in the field longer, or if I were to re-enter the field, I would attempt to address this limitation by more extensively identifying where my participants located themselves within certain groups. I would then center my data gathering efforts around these group members. I would also focus more specifically on identifying and analyzing the conflict interactions between members with different group affiliations in order to explore potential conflicted communication differences across groups.

A second limitation has to do with the fact that there are clusters of students with whom I never came in contact, such as those who are considered to be beyond the redemptive practices of a mediation program and are being released from the school system. Thus the findings of the study are framed in terms of a dominant conflicted communication system which emerges out of the similar socio-economic, social and ecological experiences of a majority of the students at Walnut School. But I do not know whether differences in practice of uncontacted student clusters exist or what influence potential differences might have on the generic practices I identified.

During the course of this writing it was tempting to make statements like, "Many Black students..." or

"Oftentimes White adolescents...", thereby ascribing behaviors to broad racial/ethnic affiliations. But I could not, in good conscience as a researcher and an educator, do so. My research methodology was not designed to bring the focus to bear upon a group of students identified on the basis of particular physical characteristics. Whoever walked through the door of the mediation office was a potential participant in this study, regardless of color, creed, socio-economic status, or conflict content.

To study a group of students based on their ethnic identity/background would have required a different approach to participation. I would have had to interview students to determine what sort of ethnic identity the student claimed and construct my participant group from there. Such an approach would have necessitated exclusion and I was interested in inclusion in this study.

However, despite the method of uncontrolled comparison, the question which needs to be asked of my study is, "If a different combination of students walked through the door, would the findings have changed?" It is to the extent that data triangulation and searches for discrepant cases to test assumptions and conclusions make an impact on the integrity of the findings, I might suspect that further group-specific research would reveal similar information.

Lastly, since I was so focused on the conduct of conflict within the school, I neglected to give proper

attention to what was occurring besides or in addition to conflicted communication. My sense is that the majority of the interactions between youth are conflictual in nature; however, as I did not incorporate any mechanisms for tracking non-conflictual behavior into my methodology, I can not claim that this statement is anything more than anecdotal or just plain intuitive.

Limitations of the Researcher

Other limitations of the study have to do with my own emergence as a researcher. The first of these limitations is my inconsistency in being sensitive to all the data being offered up. I collected data from a wide variety of participants, making sure that I had taped mediations involving a range of students. However, despite the fact that I had data, I realized during my analysis phase that I had not "tuned in" perceptually or analytically to conflicted communication involving White students and involving males to the same extent I had attended to the interactions of other students.

The reasons for this selective attention might be that the White students seemed less exotic and therefore less interesting; that the boys' world of conflicted communication was generally more cause and effect-oriented than the girls' and generally involved less time and resulted in fewer secondary disputes. Therefore I could dismiss or ignore boys' conflicts more easily since they

did not require the intricate unwinding that girls' conflicts often did.

The study is also limited by my inexperience in conducting such a focused empirical research study over an extended period of time. Not only was I learning the processes of extended qualitative research, I was also exploring a topic which is only just emerging on the research agenda.

All of these limitations, both in terms of design and capability, have implications for the quality and the integrity of the findings and the theoretical frameworks which are presented in this study. However, retrospection is always more clear-sighted than one's vision in media res. Despite the limitations, I worked as conscientiously and consistently as I was able.

End Notes

1. The exception to this statement is examined further on in the document when family allegiance is examined.

2. The term "culture" refers to broad patterns of behavior and practice among a given group of people.

3. Culture, when it is used in the phrase, school culture, refers to the notion developed within critical pedagogy that, while there are certainly gross similarities between schools, there are distinct differences which distinguish one institution from another. These differences are attributable to a variety of elements, perhaps the most important of which is the ways and means of the hidden curriculum.

4. One must keep in mind, of course, that the ways in which adolescence plays itself out is rooted in cultural practices. Consequently, adolescent conflicted communication in the United States may have a completely different shape than that in Morocco, for

example, if, indeed, the construct itself is transferable.

5. This comment is based on remarks made during conversations with Dr. Herbert Kohl in September, 1994.

6. See Blalock (1989) for a review of three significant bodies of conflict literature.

7. Strathern (1985, p. 129) provides a caution which is noteworthy. She states that many of the conflict analyses yielded by cultural anthropologists have been the result of a "descriptive activity which echoes his or her own descriptive endeavors." This is an important commentary in the contemporary world of conflict resolution studies. Each researcher must recognize his/her own teleological orientation and not assume that this orientation is a valid benchmark for the rest of the world.

8. This is not to say that ethnic and gender-specific patterns do not exist. Indeed, preliminary analyses along the domains of ethnic identify and gender indicate that there distinctive elements which are characteristic of a particular ethnic group (however roughly one defines this construct).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In preparation for this study, I drew on the research of a number of fields, especially communication, conflict studies, education and child and adolescent development. Within this chapter, I will review some of the major themes and theoretical gaps in communication, conflict studies and education literature. Adolescent development literature and additional literature from all four fields which is directly relevant to the findings will be introduced throughout the subsequent chapters.

However, before presenting the major findings and gaps within the aforementioned fields, it is useful to understand the theoretical literature which helped to frame the study and out of which my own theory-building emerged.

Contributors to the Theoretical Framework

Numerous researchers including anthropologists such as Geertz (1973), educational researchers such as McDermott and Hood (1982), and symbolic interactionists such as George Herbert Mead (1913) and Burkitt (1991), and ethnomethodologists such as Cicourel (1992) and Lynch, Livingston and Garfinkel (1983) believe that the choice as well as the range of actions available to an individual is largely dependent upon the social group and context within which the individual finds him- or herself.

I borrowed this theoretical construct to frame my own study of youth conflict. It seemed likely that the manner and method by which an individual youth engages in conflict activities is influenced by the socio-cultural patterning in the home and the community and the expansion or limitation of an individual's choice of conflict text is, to a great extent, determined by the group and context.

Burkitt advocates for the meaning of activity (method and manner) to be given an historical as well as a structural grounding. He states that:

> . . . we cannot interpret the actions or the motives of individuals simply by seeking out the meaning that has inspired their activity. Rather, we must set the activity and the individual accounts given of actions and motives in the context of their social logic: that is, of social relations and social activity as a whole. (1991, p. 194)

My study endeavors to locate adolescent conflict in the grander scheme of things and go beyond a purely descriptive account of adolescent conflict in Walnut School. To do so means moving in the direction urged by Burkitt.

Not only do the concrete, observable events of youth conflict need to be identified, youth conflict also needs to be examined across the primary contextual settings in which adolescents spend their time--school, home, community--and across texts used by different groups including school staff, parents and community members. Crossing contexts and texts means that a "thick

description" (Geertz, 1973) of adolescent conflict which has cultural, historical and structural aspects can emerge.

Goodenough's (1971) focus on the analysis of activities to delineate culture and McDermott and Hood's (1982) view of the actions of the individual being framed by the group can both be drawn together in George Herbert Mead's (1913) work on symbolic interaction. According to Burkitt (1991, pp. 190-191), Mead's understanding was that "symbols, signs and language only become meaningful because they are lodged in the practical, social activity of the group. Activity is therefore the bedrock of meaning" and an understanding and location of the 'self' of individuals can arise only "out of the relations and activities--the 'interactions'--between social beings."

> It is only on a social basis organized through symbols and language that a sense of individual self is possible, as humans see the effects of their actions reflected back at them through the responses and attitudes communicated by others. Rather than the human self existing as a monad, for Mead, the very state of human individuality and difference is only possible on the basis of social interaction and the meaningful discourse between people. Self-awareness and self-identity is only formed in society. (Burkitt, 1991, p. 191)

McDermott and Hood (1982) also propose that the individual is rather at the mercy of the group in terms of behavior and choices. Their research on children labelled as learning disabled demonstrates that a disability can actually be created and a child locked into a certain

pattern of performance because of the framing of his/her actions by the group. Their practical exploration of the interconnectedness of individual behavior and group responses provided a concrete example as my own look at youth conflict began.

I hypothesized that the choices individuals' feel they have and their uses of conflict texts (which include both vocal and nonvocal displays) in a variety of settings is part of a system of conflicted communication which has an underlying structure. If, as Burkitt states, "individuals are determined in every fibre of their being by the cultural system and the symbolic realm it generates" (1991, p. 192), then it is the intention of this study to explore how the system of adolescent conflicted communication comes to be and what symbolic realms it activates.

A Common Methodological Gap

Within all of the fields mentioned previously, conflict studies, communication, education, child and adolescent development, a methodological gap which is common to all exists--the absence of naturalistic, qualitative studies of conflict. For example, within the field of communication, while a review of contemporary literature dealing with children and conflict reveals broad groupings of research around particular themes, much of the research is quantitative and/or uses experimental designs.

This is similarly the case in the conflict studies and adolescent development literature.

Unfortunately, in the study of conflict, the reliance on findings derived via an experimental design or through statistical analyses are problematic for one fundamental reason: people are unpredictable. When a researcher asks people to manage a contrived task in a controlled setting, there is virtually no way to account for this unpredictability. Consequently, any generalizations which arise from such studies are bound to be suspect.

Since very little if, indeed, anything about conflict is static, a focus on a dynamic study of conflicts is imperative. According to Varynen, "the study of their (conflicts') resolution in a static framework belies social reality" (1991, p. 4). Perhaps analyses of static, controlled conflict situations can help inform the analyses of dynamic situations, but experimental studies alone can not provide the foundation for effective and useful conflict theory.

Neither can a controlled setting account for various other factors which can influence behavior. For example, the degree of 'public-ness' of a conflict, a variable for which it is difficult (if not impossible) to control, can have a marked impact on the way in which the conflict plays itself out.[1]

Other research designs can be equally problematic. Cognitive anthropological studies which use qualitative

methods such as interviewing focus on asking individuals what they think about their own conflict behaviors. But, in an interview, what we say we do is not always congruent with what we actually do; in other words, our saying may not be a very reliable predictor of our doing.

Going further, an individual's spoken beliefs about conflict may not result in actions which are congruent with those spoken beliefs unless one digs deep into the beliefs below beliefs[2] by tapping into stories of real life events. For example, during a recent interview, a young man was asked, "Why do you think people fight?" The young man replied, "I think it's out of ignorance." When he was asked, "Do you believe in fighting?", his response was a strong, "No." However, when the young man was asked if anyone in his family had ever been beaten up, he said, "Yes, my brother. And I went after (fought) the guy who did it."

This lack of congruity itself is an interesting area for study since stories about actions taken can reveal the hidden beliefs and values which remain unspoken but which actually drive those actions. Again, Nicholson points to the need for observation beyond, and in addition to, conversation, stating that, "How people alter their preferences is a psychological problem which can be answered only by empirical investigations of people's behavior" (1991, p. 72).

Communication

Be this methodological gap as it may, there are major areas of focus within the literature on children, conflict and communication[3]; however, significant dimensions remain unaddressed. The following review identifies both research themes and gaps in the literature.

Intra-familial Conflict

Perhaps the most prolific content area has to do with intra-familial conflict (Emery, 1992; Burleson, 1983; Brody, 1982; Clarke-Stewart, 1973; Montemayor, 1986; Smetana, 1989; Cummings et al., 1981) in various configurations. Often studies focus on young children and their interactions with their mothers (Eisenberg, 1992; Elkin, 1991), or on the impact of divorce on family and children's conflict (Forehand & Thomas, 1992; Emery, 1982). None of the studies under review make any mention of social, cultural, class or ethnic/racial considerations.

Aggression

Aggression is another theme which has generated a good deal of interest in the research community (Ferguson & Rule, 1988). These studies typically center around boys' aggressive behavior (Guerra & Slaby, 1989; Boulton, 1991; Camras, 1984; Dodge & Frame, 1982), in particular, Black boys (Coie, et al., 1991; Hudley & Graham, 1993), or around

a comparison of sex differences in aggression (McCabe & Lipscomb, 1988; Cummings et al., 1981).

Aggression is generally viewed as being located within the individual and definitions of aggression lack any consideration of the impact of context, socio-cultural patterning and norms or structural factors which might influence not only the acts of aggression but our definitions of aggression as well.

In the late 1970s, Hartup and DeWit noted that:

> children's aggression has frequently been observed in naturalistic situations. These observations, however, have been heavily constrained by clinical preconceptions about the form and functioning of such activity. Furthermore, the range of environments in which children's aggression has been observed is extremely narrow. (1978, p. 288)

But despite Hartup and De Wit's observation about naturalistic settings, in actuality, between the 1960s to the 1980s, most studies utilized an experimental research design (Shantz & Hartup, 1992) and did not differentiate between conflict and aggression (Shantz, 1987).

Bullying

Studies of bullying behavior and the characteristics of bullying children (Smith, 1991; Smith et al., 1993; Hoover et al., 1993; Olweus, 1991; Pepler & Rubin, 1991; Perry et al., 1990; Whitney et al., 1992), of behavior disorders (Brion-Meisels, 1984) and of difficult children (French & Waas, 1985) also dot the children's conflict

literature landscape. Again, many of these studies use quantitative research designs and are limited by the same criticisms given of aggression studies.

Rough-and-Tumble Play

Children's play (Ditchburn, 1988), in particular, the rough-and-tumble sort of play, is also examined (Humphreys & Smith, 1984). Some studies (Smith & Lewis, 1985; Smith et al., 1992; Pellegrini, 1988, 1989a, 1989b) examine the distinctions between rough-and-tumble play and aggressive fighting or real fighting. Other studies focus on the function of gender in rough-and-tumble play (DiPietro, 1981). Humphreys and Smith (1984) stress the fact that there has been little research on the way these distinctions are manifested with older children. Again, there is an absence of socio-cultural considerations.

Verbal Communication

A final major thematic category is that of verbal communication. This category is something of a catchall and includes: argumentation theory and research (O'Keefe & Benoit, 1982; Corsaro & Rizzo, 1990; Elliott, 1981; Dorval & Grundy, 1990; Genishi & DiPaolo, 1982); verbal disputing (Boggs, 1978); persuasive skills (Clark et al., 1985; Delia et al., 1979; Forbes & Lubin, 1984; Haslett, 1983) and the function of gender in these skills (Finley & Humphreys, 1974); negotiation (Schultz & Selman, 1989); and

justification skills (Dunn & Munn, 1987). The same gaps identified in the previous thematic groupings are found here as well, with the exception of considerations of gender.

Cross-cultural Verbal Communication

Two noteworthy exceptions to the glaring lack of cross-cultural research in children's verbal communication (Cazden, 1970) are found in the work done by Goodwin (1980, 1982a, 1982b, 1983a, 1983b, 1990) and Goodwin and Goodwin (1987) and Shuman (1986). The work of these researchers focuses on Black children from urban and working class backgrounds and takes into consideration gender differences as well.

Goodwin believes that conflict can provide children with the opportunity to develop and practice a variety of activities. For example, she states that the activity of arguing "provides children with a rich arena for the development of proficiency in language, syntax, and social organization" (1987, p. 200). Speaking of age-specific verbal conflict behavior, Shuman states that "conversations and playful exchanges...(make adolescence) a period of play with texts" (Shuman, 1986, p. 2). However, none of these studies are framed within a critical perspective.

Concluding Comments

Despite the specific contributions of these authors to children's communication research, the substantial gaps which exist across these research themes reviewed in the previous pages should be obvious. There is a noticeable lack of attention paid to culture- and gender-specific considerations. These two areas are generally not taken into account unless the research design specifically targets a particular group for a specific topical purpose, i.e, Black boys and aggression. The absence of critiques which explicitly identify and target gender and/or inter- and intra-cultural critiques of youth conflict is especially alarming in a multi-cultural society such as the United States.

There are a few scattered cross-national studies of conflict such as the comparison of Italian and English children's responses to playfighting (Costabile, et al., 1991) or intra-cultural studies such as the ability of Zapotec children to distinguish between playfighting and real fighting (Fry, 1987). But few studies exist which look into cultural and/or gender-specific behaviors within a nation.

The second obvious gap in the communication conflict literature is the absence of studies which utilize a critical framework and explore class, race and social group in order to help make sense of findings. While research in the fields of communication, socio-linguistics (Labov,

1966, 1972; Wolfram, 1969) and linguistic anthropology reveal findings which are interesting in their own right and which support the focus of this study, it is essential, in view of contemporary issues regarding the physical and emotional safety and security of youth, to locate these findings in a critical framework in order to gain an understanding of the function and patterns of conflict. Without such an understanding, the safety and security of children can not be guaranteed.

A third gap which exists across the thematic arenas is the lack of integration of studies of isolated linguistic phenomena with the broader socio-cultural activity of conflict. Our knowledge of linguistic activities such as arguing and text play must be located within conflict. These activities must also explored across the specific contexts of school, home and community in order to access the depth and detail of data that allows the researcher to identify to the greatest extent possible those elements most fundamental or central to the people under observation.

Conflict Studies

Studies of conflict make up a significant part of the literature in a variety of fields. But this is perhaps most particularly the case in anthropological literature. Unfortunately, most anthropological studies have been conducted in settings considered more exotic than inner

city schools in the United States and sociological and psychological studies which do target Americans have frequently done so in order to reinforce theories of deviance or cultural impoverishment.

When conflict studies began to define itself as a field in its own right after World War II, it was emerging (and continues to emerge) out of a variety of disciplines including anthropology, psychology, and sociology, each of which has a particular take on conflict. For example,

> Psychologists have focused on intrapersonal conflict; social psychologists have concentrated on interpersonal and intergroup conflict; sociologists have stressed social role, status and class conflicts; economists have focused on game theory and decision-making, economic competition, labor negotiations and trade disputes; political scientists and international specialists have centered their work on political international conflicts. (Deutsch, 1991, p. 26)

Blalock (1989, p. 4), in his turn, notes that there are three primary approaches to the study of conflict found in the literature: the highly systematic, mathematical or relatively formalistic approaches; the descriptive approach which details single case studies or at most compares three to six historical instances involving conflict and; the heavily ideological approach which focuses on special kinds of conflict between, for example, social classes or racial/ethnic groups.

The Need for Naturalistic Studies

But despite this range of inter-disciplinary interests and approaches, the common lacuna is the absence of naturalistic, descriptive studies (Schellenberg, 1982; Varynen, 1991; Deutsch, 1991) within multicultural settings. Indeed, some authors to speculate that it is not so much the paucity of theoretical positions that plagues conflict studies (Blalock, 1989, p. 3) as it is the lack of systematic empirical studies (Burton, 1986, p. 40) which either expand or negate extant theorizing about conflict processes.

The emergent methodological shift from the laboratory or the history books to the field will help conflict studies begin to catch up with other fields such as socio-linguistics which relies on the local sense-making of communities of speakers as a starting point for fleshing out the depths of diversity (or similarity). Monolithic analyses of classes and ethnics need to be deconstructed to reveal the human complexities therein.

In addition, anthropological studies which are field-based but which are criticized generally for their ethnocentric analytical frameworks will be pushed toward interpretative and critical analyses. According to Strathern (1985, p. 129), many of the conflict analyses yielded by anthropologists have been the product of a "descriptive activity which echoes his or her (the researcher's) own descriptive endeavors." Studies which

attempt to capture the participants' interpretations are beginning to appear, but still represent a gap in the literature.

Absence of a Critical Perspective

The critical dimension represents a second gap in conflict studies literature, that is, how and why it is that conflict is occurring as it is? In the case of my study, the question becomes, What are the structural impactors on interpersonal or group conflict? While there is a comfort level expressed within the literature with descriptive or even interpretative studies of conflict, there is little mention of the need to attach these analytical perspectives to a broader critical analysis (Strathern, 1985; Varynen, 1991).

Education

The behavior of youth in schools has generally been categorized in one of two predominant and broad ways: as being oppositional or deviant in nature or as being receptive to the education system and the learning environment. It is the oppositional behavior, not surprisingly, which has received the most attention. Many of the studies mentioned previously in the communication review fit into this category.

Gaps in Conservative and Radical Critiques

Conservative educators have generally located youths' oppositional behavior in psychological categories that regard an individual's behavior (and thereby the individual) as deviant, disruptive, and inferior, effectively ignoring the impact of structural factors on individuals and groups (Fordham, 1993). On the other hand, radical educators have generally overemphasized those very "structural determinants (that) promote economic and cultural inequality" (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985, p.96), but have ignored individual agency in the construction, maintenance and transformation of those structures. According to Aronowitz and Giroux (1985, p. 96), research has displayed an "underemphasis on how human agency accommodates, mediates, and resists the logic of capital and its dominating social practices."

But in addition to this underemphasis on human agency, radical critiques have also tended to focus on the subordination of a minority group by a dominant ethnic group (Baratz & Baratz, 1970; Lewis, 1976; Ogbu, 1979), excluding consideration of settings where the ethnic or class minority group-dominant group power dichotomy is not present but where certain students are still punished by the system while others from the same background are rewarded (Gibson, 1982, p. 25).

In a similar vein, radical critiques have also neglected to adequately examine the social ecologies of

individual schools which have different student class and/or ethnic configurations and do then extend the analyses to consider the broader social setting in which the school itself and the students are located (Wexler, 1992). Acknowledging that different schools have different ecologies is especially important with regard to my study.

Applying White, middle class mainstream norms of interaction which have been established as the baseline for normality is inappropriate in my study since the great majority of my participants are from a similar low-income background (albeit not always similar physical environments) and two-thirds of the students share a common Hispanic or African-American heritage. According to Gibson,

> Researchers need to look not only at teaching and learning as they occur at school, both in and out of the classroom, but also at the interrelation between school, home, community and workplace. Too few ethnographic studies have investigated adequately how schools relate to the larger society of which they are a part and to the historical, political, social, and economic processes within it. (1982, p. 25)

In addition one could add that too few ethnographic studies have adequately investigated the content and construction of students' social interactions and how that social interactional sphere relates to the school and the broader processes. While I, too, am interested in the ways in which my participants interact with the adult power hierarchy in the school, my main focus is on exploring the establishment and maintenance of a particular conflicted

communication system between students whose class and oftentimes ethnic/racial backgrounds are similar.

The conservative overemphasis on deviance and the radical underemphasis on human agency creates a need for ethnographies of schooling which address both the micro- and macro-levels and employ a multilevel approach (Ogbu, 1981a). Such ethnographics of the conflicted communication of adolescents which can inform effective policy-making and programming are essential.

End Notes

1. Throughout the course of my research at an inner city middle school, this was a pattern which emerged consistently. The more public a conflict was, the more people got involved and the more complicated and protracted the conflict became.

2. Michael Nicholson cites Amartya Sen who calls this phenomenon 'preferences among a set of preferences'. According to Nicholson, a person might say, "'I want a cigarette' while simultaneously asserting 'I wish I were not a smoker.' That is, 'I prefer one course of action at the moment to any other, but I wish that I did not'" (1991, p. 71).

3. Shantz and Hartup (1992. pp. 3-11) provide a succinct review of some of these areas as well.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN, DATA ANALYSIS, AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This chapter provides an in-depth description of the methodology utilized in this study and the data collection process as well as data analysis processes and ethical considerations related to the research study.

The Ethnographic Method

In order to understand the practice of conflicted communication and to represent the conflict activity in the participants' own terms, the study has been grounded in the processes of participant-observation favored initially by cultural anthropologists. The ethnographic method has subsequently been adopted by researchers from other disciplines, including education. Educational ethnography has the potential to unearth differently shaped sources of information, thus complementing the more traditional work of educational psychology and quantitative approaches.

The ethnographic method also enables the researcher to address social and cultural differences, thus enriching the research process and the emergent data. Very few assumptions about what is normal can be made when one is conducting research in culturally diverse settings. Very little can or should be presumed, especially in the interests of countering "the hegemony of educational

psychology in our language of education" (McDermott & Hood, 1982, p. 100). According to Spradley, "ethnography yields empirical data about the lives of people in specific situations. It allows us to see alternative realities and modify our culture-bound theories of human behavior" (1980, p. 16).

Some researchers such as Connell (1994, p. 132) assert that ethnography, with its emphasis on the uniquenesses and distinctiveness of the participants and its assumption of the coherence of the group being studied, may not be the best research approach to bring to light the interplay and interconnectedness between different groups. Perhaps this criticism has some validity for several reasons.

First, the original intent of ethnography was, indeed, to bring into the limelight a particular community of people, generally exotic folks from non-Western regions who shared what could be defined as a common cultural heritage. The intent was to investigate patterns of actions and interactions (Spindler & Spindler, 1987). The classical interpretations of tribal societies used a structuralist framework which views cultural boundaries as stable, impermeable and neatly laid out. Such a perspective may not have a great deal of merit (Hooks, 1989, 1990; Greenblatt, 1990; Grossberg, 1993), especially when one is conducting research in a post-industrial, multicultural context.

Indeed, cultural studies scholars point to their own personal locations within the boundaries of their own cultural practice and then point to the fluidity of those very boundaries (Cooks, 1993). Geertz (1973) uses the term "blurred genres" and urges the researcher to strive for "thick descriptions" within ethnographic studies. The desired effect is a scratching below the surface in order to illustrate the complexity inherent within a given cultural setting.

Second, because classical ethnography was not established to perform a critical function, the appropriateness of using the methodology to achieve a blend of purposes can be called into question. In other words, how appropriate is it to conduct a bounded and limited study of interpersonal relationships in order to expose and comment on structural factors--one of the proposed outcomes of my study? This question will be addressed in greater detail within the dissertation.

A third reason for the hesitation in using ethnography has to do with an 'insider' studying her/his own group. This interest in and use of ethnography with diverse groups in the United States is a relatively recent phenomenon. An insider studying other insiders causes raised eyebrows because of the question of the loss the cross-cultural perspective (Agar, 1980, pp. 12 & 22).

In the case of my study, the argument can be made that although I scrape the same national mud off my shoes as the

participants in my study, our respective social identity groups and consequently our experiences are wildly different. For example, between myself and my participants there is an urban-rural division, a racial division, a middle income-low income class division, and so on. I am perhaps not so much an insider after all.

But none of these reasons should negate the feasibility of using ethnographic methods to conduct research which is aimed at doing the very thing which Connell (1994) promotes--fleshing out of the ways of doing and being of different groups and then the meshing those ways in order to paint a picture which illustrates interconnections and interplay. In my study these interconnections and interplay are between adolescent youth from ethnically/racially diverse backgrounds in an inner city context.

The Research Questions

The original intent of this study was to consider two questions: 1) What are the patterns of cross-cultural conflict among adolescents? and 2) How does the school, the community and the home make and impact on adolescent conflict? Since my interest was in the interface between persons of different cultural/ethnic backgrounds and because data I had collected during a five-month long pilot project in a high school in Summertown led me in that direction, Question 1 seemed appropriate.

However, within the first month at Walnut Middle School, it became clear to me that: firstly, the participants were not identifying cultural/ethnic/racial content in their conflicts and; secondly, the majority of the conflicts I was encountering were between students who, broadly speaking, belonged to the same ethnic/racial groups. Consequently, Question 1 was transformed into a broader, more generic and, I believe, more basic question: What does the activity of conflict look like as it is carried out among adolescent youth in an inner city setting?, that is, What are the patterned forms and content of adolescent youth conflict? Question 2 remained the same.

The Research Site

Exploring the net of youth conflict as it is cast across school, home, and community, requires the untying of intricate interactional knots. I selected Walnut Middle School in Summertown, Massachusetts, and dropped anchor. Walnut School is located in an inner city area and serves approximately 1,000 students, one-third of whom are of Hispanic (predominantly Puerto Rican) heritage, one-third of whom are of African-American heritage and one-third of whom are of European-American heritage. Walnut was once a neighborhood school mainly for students of Puerto Rican heritage. The student composition of the school changed

six years ago when the 'schools of choice'[1] program was initiated.

I chose Walnut as my research site for three reasons: the school has had a peer mediation program for the past five years; the ethnic/racial composition of the student body is diverse; and the school is located in the inner city. While it would be appropriate to provide a more detailed presentation of the research site at this point in time, I will instead refer the reader to Chapter IV. Walnut School as an institution is a key concept and therefore aspects of the hidden curriculum and social interactions within the school will be discussed at length since they dramatically affect adolescent conflicted communication.

The Researcher's Role

I requested permission to conduct research at Walnut from the mediation program coordinator, the school principal and the school district's director of research and evaluation.

I worked eight hours per week in the mediation program and conducted research at the school itself for ten months and for eight more months outside of the school. I was alternately a participant in, observer of and mediator for the conflict activities of adolescents. I attempted to build rapport with students, staff and parents. Even

though there is an emphasis in the ethnography in education literature on attempting to be unobtrusive (Spradley, 1980), I found that being unobtrusive was virtually impossible and not always necessarily desireable.

Attempting to be unobtrusive oftentimes proved to be a liability rather than an asset. The norm of adult intervention in student affairs is extremely strong at Walnut and to fade into the role of a seemingly unobtrusive researcher during conflict activities was confusing to the students and ill-received by the staff. Generally speaking, I was more of an active participant than a passive observer (Spradley, 1980).

Participants

There are approximately 1,000 students at Walnut School--far too many to establish the level of rapport necessary for revealing "beefs" (disputes) and their resolutions to one adult researcher. In addition, there are students whose paths I never crossed for one primary reason: the students themselves never crossed the threshold of the mediation office.

Perhaps they belonged to the group of students who were beyond salvation by the mediation program (in other words, these students were probably dropping out or being pushed out of the school system); perhaps they belonged to a second group of students who never engaged in any noticeable conflicts; or perhaps they belonged to the group

which just did not want to "be mediated", as the students say.

My participants, consequently, are the two hundred-plus students who have in some way been connected to the mediation program. That connection may have been very loose. It might have been based only on the student's physical proximity to the mediation office. For example, if he/she were waiting to see the vice principal, whose office is directly across from the mediation office, I would invite the student in to talk about conflict. But more often, the participants were in the mediation office to be mediated or to conduct mediations for their peers.

Fieldwork

The data for this study were gathered over a period of eighteen months (see Table 1). During this time, my goal was to get to know the students in school and in their communities and homes in order to understand the working of conflict in their lives and to understand conflict from the "point of view of the historically and culturally situated individual" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). During Phase I, the first four months of this eighteen-month study, I conducted a pilot study of student conflict at Wilder High School (grades 9-12) in Summertown. I spent two days per week observing and taking fieldnotes in the alternative discipline room which was staffed by an adult mediator. I conducted four structured in-depth interviews with one

Table 1

Data Collection Chart

Time-frame (months)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	12	18	totals
Observations	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Field notes	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	50 pages
Interviews																			
Unstructured					x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		(fieldnotes)
Semi-structured														x	x	x	x	x	10 family members
Structured	x	x	x	x					x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	14 persons
Focus Group															x	x			8 non-traditional students
Mediation audiotapes					x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x					55 tapes/220 students/40 transcriptions
Written Documents					x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	Photos/maps/demographic data/training outputs/attendance/suspension/detention lists

adult and three students. As a result of the pilot study, I decided that an intensive study of middle school-aged children would yield the most intriguing data since adolescence is, by United States cultural definition, a time of being in the middle.

The following ten months (four days per week), Phase II, of the research study were spent at Walnut Middle School. As a participant, I actively mediated conflict situations between students at Walnut Middle School. I audiotaped 55 mediations and selected 40 for transcription. Along with 50 pages of fieldnotes taken during the ten months of observations and of unstructured and semi-structured audiotaped interviews of students and staff from the school, these mediation audiotapes and transcriptions comprise the bulk of my research data.

While most of my time was spent at Walnut School, I visited the homes of five students and sat in my car by parks and other communal gathering places (the MacDonald's parking lot) as well during Phase III, the final four months of the study. Consequently, my data-gathering methods shifted during these times. I supplemented the school-based research data with data collected in front of and in the students' homes.

In front of the homes, I was an observer taking fieldnotes. Inside the homes, I was an avid listener and questioner, conducting both unstructured and semi-structured interviews with ten different family members

from five families. The families were selected on the bases of: my familiarity with the middle school-aged youth in the family; the participation of that youth in a complex conflict during the school year; the youth's ability to tell stories and provide details; and the ethnicity/racial and socio-economic background of the youth's family. I visited the five families at least three times for at least one hour each time.

The Data-Gathering Frame

I have framed my research study using the work of Spradley (1980) and Goetz and Lecompte (1984) (see Table 1). Spradley provides the overall organizing skeleton which has allowed me to visualize the process of data collection as an inverted pyramid, moving from broad to narrow. The steps of the inversion are described in the next section.

Goetz and LeCompte (1984) supplied the lifeblood--the cognitive activities--that allowed the various internal organs (mediation audiotapes, audio-taped interviews, field observations, written materials) of the research methodology to stay vital through analytical processes. Viewing the research process as an organic and holistic endeavor, wherein data gathering is not separated from data analyses after the initial grand tour is completed, is key in the conduct of ethnographic research.

Observations. Spradley (1980, p. 33) lays out a cyclical research pattern which starts by a grand tour of the research territory and then gradually narrows in focus. I have used this overall framework to structure my activities, beginning with **wide-focused descriptive observations** to get a sense of life in the school and to develop a general understanding of school conflicts.

Goetz and LeCompte call this "adopting a studied naivete that allows (the ethnographer) to view each aspect of the phenomena as if it were new and unfamiliar and, hence, potentially significant" (1984, p. 168). I determined that sufficient time had been devoted to the studied naivete phase when I grew familiar with the time schedule, the physical and logistical layout and knew the teachers and about thirty students by name and by sight. I also moved away from wide-focused observation once I had enough data to begin to map out the initial units of analysis.

Narrowing to **focused observations** came as a result of watching for particular events which came out of the wide-focused observations and which were selected for further study because they seemed likely to clarify my developing understanding of school conflict. I continued with focused observations throughout the eighteen months of research in order to make sure that sufficient data have been collected to enable me to address the first research question.

For example, focused observation included standing outside of the mediation office in the 7th grade hallway as soon as I heard classes changing. If I could not leave the office, I would listen for the voices of several teachers who frequently got into conflict situations with students during passing time and I wrote up fieldnotes on the interchanges.

Finally I narrowed even further to **selective observations** relevant to particular conflict themes and patterns which I then "oversampled." Certain conflict content (Schofield, 1989, p. 30) which had to do with the permeable boundaries between home, school and community were targeted specifically. I recorded all data using fieldnotes, photographs, maps, and audiotapes when and where possible.

The Data

The data for this study are taken from three main sources: transcribed audiotapes of youth mediations, semi-structured and unstructured informal interviews and my fieldnotes (see Table 1).

Mediation Audiotapes. For ten months, four days out of each school week, I audiotaped 55 and transcribed 40 mediation sessions of a wide variety of disputants (e.g., boys with boys, girls with girls, girls with boys, African-American girl with African-American girl, Puerto Rican boy

with European-American boy, etc.) engaged in a variety of disputes.

The mediation transcripts served as the primary data source for the micro and macro level spheres of analysis. The transcripts also provided the direction for the in-depth interviews described in the next paragraph.

Interviews. Another significant part of the research methodology was the informal and in-depth interviews of students, school staff, parents and community leaders within Walnut School and the Summertown neighborhoods where students live.

Interviews were structured using the same broad-based to selective cycle indicated above. I conducted informal, unstructured interviews with people from diverse backgrounds and in different positions in the school and community. The informal interviews provided a means of checking out my perceptions and continuing iterative and ongoing data analyses as well as being the source of new data to be probed further.

I analyzed the informal interview data and targeted certain individuals for more in-depth interviews. Finally, when the interview cadre and the content had been narrowed down to specific conflict themes and patterns, I selected a group of individuals to continue interviewing in-depth. Two separate in-depth interviews of 45 minutes each were conducted with four school staff and three community members/leaders.

I used the in-depth interview process with seven selected students as well in order to gain more focused data. However, this procedure was not always a valid technique to use when attempting to gain access to actual conflict texts of students. I found occasionally that when a student talked with me--the adult, the mediator, the researcher--the verbal and physical conflict texts and codes changed significantly. However, enough unmoderated data emerged from my fieldnotes and actual mediation for this not to be a concern,

I audiotaped a focus group interview which is also considered a viable method for gathering data in qualitative research studies (Gordon-Popatia, 1993) on two separate occasions for one hour each time. The focus group consisted of eight Puerto Rican, African-American and White high school-aged students in an alternative education program.

The focus group interviews allowed me to gain access to the conflict texts older youths use with each other. Within the focus group meetings, students were asked to tell stories of actual conflicts and to respond to open-ended questions which were created out of the data I had gathered during the academic year. The audiotapes were transcribed.

Written Sources. Written sources included articles from the Summertown Daily News about youth conflict. Daily attendance lists from Walnut School which list suspensions,

absences, etc., were collected as were staff newsletters. Written data from activities conducted during two separate three-day mediation training programs with forty students were also collected.

Data Analysis

The body of my data was noted previously in the methodology section. I will address each of the sections of data upon which I drew to write this study separately within the analysis section. The bodies of data correspond to Chapters IV through VIII of this study. Since each of these chapters is distinctive in focus and content, the data analyses necessarily were different. There are descriptive findings concerning the structured patterns and the particular content of adolescent conflict as well as critical and interpretative findings. I therefore approached the body of my data differently to meet the requirements of each of these chapters (see Table 2).

All in all, I read through the body of my data no less than four times. Different mediation and interview transcriptions emerged as key informing pieces, depending on which type of analysis I was conducting and therefore these pieces were read and re-read, marked and re-marked.

I supported my analyses in a number of ways. I frequently cycled back through my hard copies, I checked out my readings with some key participants, and I conversed with several people who were not connected with the study

Table 2

Data Analysis Procedures

Analyses	Data Sources	PROCESS							
Descriptive-Content Themes	55 Tapes	Listen	Select 40 tapes	Transcribe	Read Transcripts	Color Code Themes/Topics	Record Themes/ Topics (1/page)	Group Themes/Topics by Category	Presentation by Frequency
Descriptive-Patterned Forms	40 Transcripts	Read Transcripts	Select 15 conflict situations	Construct conflict maps	Compare/Contrast maps	Construct generic models	Present models		
Critical Analysis	All written data	Grand sweep for School/ Community Comments	Compare/Contrast Comments	Construct categories	Merge with Descriptive/ Interpretive Analyses	Present Findings			
Interpretive Analysis	Content Theme Categories	Re-read color-coded transcripts	Identify highly emotive themes	Compare/ Contrast emotive themes	Categorize emotive themes	Analyze "face" theme	Establish "face" dimensional categories	Present "face" dimensional categories	

but who shared similar class, ethnic/racial and experiential backgrounds with the participants. I also kept running notes on my interpretations and reviewed those each time I began to go through my data. I sought out discrepant and negative cases and I acknowledge them within the findings presented in this study.

Analysis of Patterned Forms and Content Themes. I drew on the largest segment of my data--the 55 audiotaped mediation sessions--to conduct a descriptive analysis of the structured patterns and themes. These audiotapes range from 30 minutes to several hours in length. There are 220 primary disputants. I listened to all of the tapes at least once, took notes and selected 40 tapes which represented a range of topics, disputants and content. I then transcribed each of these 40 tapes verbatim.

Identification of Content Themes. Once the transcriptions were completed, I conducted an initial analytical sweep to deal with the content of conflicts. At this level, my analysis was purely descriptive. I was seeking only to identify congruence and discongruence, occurrence and recurrence. Working from the hard copies, I read through the individual mediations one by one, using colored markers to identify thematic/topical content and make margin notes. I also wrote each new theme/topic out on a blank sheet of paper and listed the location of specific thematic content on the sheet.

I added to the lists as I went through each new transcription. After all the transcriptions had been analyzed in this manner, I returned to the thematic sheets and re-read the sections I had documented, establishing what I called the dominant themes and noting down instances of deviation or discrepancy. Several broad dimensional categories emerged and I grouped the themes under them accordingly: adolescence, family, ethnicity, school and neighborhood. From these broad dimensions, I selected the themes which recurred the most often or which were unique in some respect.

Identification of Patterned Forms. To identify the structured patterns of conflicted communication, I also drew predominantly on the mediation data as well as on the focus group interviews with the high school-aged students and on the semi-structured interviews with adolescent participants. I went through 15 of the 40 mediation transcriptions and developed conflict maps, diagramming each situation along several dimensions including participants, timeframe, triggers/acts/events, location. The 15 were selected because they represented a mixture of female-female, female-male and male-male conflicts.

Out of a comparative analysis of these maps, a number of characteristics appeared which were incorporated into a holistic, super-framework of conflicted communication. The model captured the qualities of fluidity, recursiveness,

irresolution and historicity. I was also able to construct several descriptive generic models.

The Critical Analysis

I conducted a second grand sweep through all of my hard data once again, writing down the specific comments which had to do with the school and the community environments. I then analyzed each of these lists and looked for similarities across the lists. The categories which emerged out of this comparison were physical environment of school and neighborhood, class, ethnicity/race, social dynamics in school and the neighborhood. These categories are braided together and an attempt is made to demonstrate their impact on the conduct of youth conflict.

Interpretation of the Force of Symbols

From the themes identified in the content sweep described earlier, I identified a number of key themes which generated strong reactions which I attributed to the fact that a symbolic nerve had been struck. These key themes fell into several categories which were adolescent-specific with regard to power and status (back-up, rep) or with regard to gender relationships (sweatin' over my man), family-specific (mother, child, extended family) and transcendent (face).

For the purposes of presentation in the dissertation, I selected one recurring theme, "Face", and conducted a multi-level analysis of the symbolic realms it evoked. To do this, I read through all of the transcripts again and made notes of the instances in which the term, face, was used. I then grouped the instances along several dimensions which emerged from the list: the physical, the relational, the historical, the material. I chose one particularly rich example which engaged all of these dimensions of face and used it for the interpretative analysis presented in Chapter VIII.

Interpretive work of this sort was challenging because, in the words of Van Maanen,

> . . . what Cicourel (1967) calls "background expectancies". . . must always be inferred by the fieldworker since such assumptions are regarded as fully unproblematic by members of the studied organization. (1983, p. 41)

Remarks on Theory-making

While I have laid out all of my analytic processes in a very linear manner, the preliminary analysis with the emergent data base during my fieldwork was ongoing and circular. I was constantly piecing together and embroidering interpretations, seeking out patterns, checking in with participants for their critiques of my observational handiwork.

By the same token, the theoretical findings at which I arrived were very much the product of a circular and

recursive process. I read and re-read content, thought about and played with it, developed some ideas, went back to the content, re-thought the ideas, consulted the available relevant literature, thought about that and my ideas and the content, etc., etc., etc., until I finally arrived at an interpretation which, in the end, "felt" like the right fit. This whole process was dialectic in that I used my material to help establish a base of theoretical knowledge on adolescent conflicted communication and to raise questions about existing theory (Woods, 1982, p. 22) rather than trying to fit my data to or to refute a particular theoretical framework.

This process itself also belongs to the critical ethnography tradition. Underpinning and influencing my analysis of the data, particularly those found in the descriptive-interpretive chapters, was, in Angus' (1986, cf. Benson, 1977; Giddens, 1979) words, a reliance on the ontological grounding in the dialectic between human behavior and social and organizational structure. This view is essential to my analytical perspective, indeed, for it explains the very different behavior of students toward adult mediators whom they trust to act with respect toward them and toward some teachers who act in a disrespectful manner.

A critical dialectical analysis helped me to avoid the trap of totalizing either structures or behavior and allowed me to see the way that participants in this study

"actively create meanings that generate the human practices out of which structures emerge" (Thomas, 1983, p. 47).

Ethics

For more than one academic year, I audiotaped mediation sessions and interviews. All of the participants who were taped were asked to give their permission in writing. They were also told that they could withdraw their consent at any point. Three participants did so and their recordings were not used as part of the data for this study. I attempted to get parental permission slips to tape-record students since, at the time of the study, they were under-age.

But collecting parental permission was problematic on two counts: 1) mediation is supposed to be private and voluntary. Even though I had not explicitly mentioned on the permission form that the student had been in a mediation, students were often reluctant to subject themselves to the questioning they felt might accompany the presentation of the permission paper to their parents; and 2) students who felt comfortable taking the permission slip home oftentimes did not return it, even though they said they had gotten their parents' signatures.

In a sincere attempt to not violate human subject ethics, I verbally and in writing explained the study and then asked those students whom I knew well if they would allow me to audiotape the sessions. For those students

with whom I had not established a solid trust relationship, I needed to balance issues of "power over."

Therefore I asked a student peer to explain what I was doing and then to ask for permission to do the taping. If the student agreed to being taped, I re-entered the room and re-explained the project to make sure he/she had understood and to answer any questions. I then asked for permission again. If the student was reluctant to be taped, I did not push the matter any further and did not tape.

End Notes

1. Families are given some voice in choosing the public school a child will attend.

CHAPTER IV

INTRODUCING WALNUT SCHOOL

Listen to the Mustn'ts, child
Listen to the Don'ts.
Listen to the Shouldn'ts, the
Impossibles, the Won'ts.
Listen to the Never Haves
Then listen close to me--
Anything can happen, child.
Anything can be.

(Shel Silverstein poem posted
on a 6th grade classroom door)

While it is not my intention to conduct a critique of the staff to student relationships within the school or the school as an organization,[1] it is important to identify at least some of the elements which contribute to the workings of adolescent conflict. The noticeable impact of these elements will be addressed throughout the following sections of this chapter. An understanding of these elements is necessary in order to comprehend the patterned complexity of conflicted communication among the students at Walnut Middle School.

The intent of this chapter is: first, to provide a feel for the physical entity called Walnut Middle School since that structure is both the back-drop for and an influence on social interactions; second, to introduce the importance of the fact of the institutionalization of conflicted communication; third, to examine some elements of the hidden curriculum, including staff attitudes toward students and; fourth, to examine some of the underlying

perceptual themes which guided people's day-to-day interactions.

The fact of institutionalization, the inter- and intra-group interactional themes, the physical environment of Walnut School and the elements of the hidden curriculum all combine to form a context within which youth conflicted communication is carried out. The chapter concludes by introducing a theoretical construct I call 'fluidity of boundaries' which based on the notion of cultural discontinuity.

Walnut Middle School: A Physical Profile

The age and condition of Walnut School are often commented upon by both staff and students. Two eighth grade women in the gifted and talented track say,

> The first year here, it didn't look as bad. The 6th grade, they always kept up until, people sort of, like--they almost pushed a kid out of a window. And we finally realized that this school was messed up when that window still isn't fixed to this day (three years later). (Shonda, Tape 12, lines 45-53)

> Last year, I had to go to a student council meeting. And all the schools were there saying what they would like to have happen to their school for the summer and Blue Skies School went up there and said something about, they need shades and curtains because when they try to work, the sun is shining in their eyes. And we told them about our ceilings. We told them about the locker rooms. And they (administrators) told Blue Skies that they were going to work on it and they should have their curtains by--in about a month or so. They just dismissed us. They were just like, "Ok. Fine." Then we sat down. They didn't even say that they were working on it. They didn't even acknowledge it. They just, you

know, heard us and we sat down. (Shelly, Tape 12, lines 89-102)

The general disrepair of the building appears to have a direct impact on both students' and staffs' morale and attitudes toward the type of education being provided. Students joke about the crumbling walls and the caged off areas which block entry to even more decayed parts of the building; however, the comments are a thin skin which is stretched opaquely over thicker, more weighty expressions of disadvantage, cynicism and mutual condemnation--staff of students, students of staff and staff of other staff.

The Importance of Institutionalization

The patterns of interpersonal conflicted communication differ significantly in nature and structure[2] when the individuals involved are members of an institutionalized group encountering each other on a daily basis versus persons encountering each other sporadically who share no common experience within an institutionalized setting. Although this is a strong claim to make, comparison of my data and studies of interpersonal communication indicates the necessity of a shared 'conflict culture' which allows individuals to engage in particular complementary patterned responses.

For purposes of analogy, one might compare individuals' institutionalized and non-institutionalized conflict patterns with individuals' conflict patterns in and out of the family setting. One may enact conflict with

different patterns and different degrees of intensity and frequency within a family than with social strangers.

When a group of people is brought together within a physical structure, whether the boundaries of that structure are a school building or government-subsidized housing projects,[3] the very fact of institutionalization itself creates its own culture (Goffman, 1961; Foucault, 1977), both in terms of the emotional atmosphere and patterns of interaction (Nagpaul, 1991). According to Nagpaul (1991), who has looked into the effects of urban overcrowding, the more densely populated a setting, the greater the social problems. Referring specifically to conflict, the higher the population density, the more frequent and intensified are conflict situations. Such studies have implications for schools which are both physically large and overcrowded or relatively small in size and still overcrowded.

Having noted the difficulties which arise due to high population density and the increase in conflict situations and their level of intensity, I do not mean to imply that all conflict within institutionalized settings is bad. Indeed, the conflicted communication of the participants in this institutional setting reveals orderly patterned progressions while the content reflects and displays some of mainstream American society's most cherished values--directness, telling the truth, respect for authority, standing up for oneself and one's beliefs. But the manner

in which external environmental and emergent contextual factors influence behavior and attitudes are only beginning to be addressed directly in research studies (Phinney & Rotheram, 1987, p. 291).

Depth psychology has traditionally examined early childhood and family experiences, but it has generally ignored the potential for examining the effect of social institutional life as a key for self formation. Critical theorists as well have ignored this potentially fertile ground of exploration. Although an assumption of critical theory is that institutional processes are self formative, these processes and their differential relations to self dynamics are rarely studied. Consequently, there is an absence of psychodynamic empirical studies of institutional life (Wexler, 1992, p. 127).

This gap has obvious implications for this study. Little has been written about how youth mediate their identities among and between one another through the practices of conflict within the school context (or how those identities themselves are mediated by conflicted communications in which the youth engage). Equally little has been written about how the school as an institution mediates the creation of identities by individuals or small groups of students. In Wexler's words, there is a "failure to attend to socially patterned self-dynamics in school" (1992, p. 128). This failure has a direct effect on the

manner in which educators understand youth and their own role as adults within the institution.

The patterns of conflicted communication which present themselves within a given institution are dependent upon the miscibility of the various expressions of conflict carried in and carried out by the inhabitants as well as the structural elements of the institution itself. When dealing with a conflict situation between two students, one is confronting more than the initiating conflict trigger itself. One is dealing with familial, ethnic and community patterns of response as well as the individual sensibilities of the disputants as they manifest in the institutional setting we call school.

The Hidden Curriculum: Staff Attitudes Toward Students and the Resulting Structures

The immensity of the socio-cultural surface one is scratching is seldom realized or recognized in schools. When attention is paid, teachers generally lump students together in much the same way that much of the literature does: broadly, along either racial/ethnic or socio-economic lines. Comments from a number of Walnut educators reveal the gross assumptions born out of superficial knowledge based on externalities which categorize but do not really describe.

When a teacher says, "Well, you know where she lives, don't you?" or, in response to a concern expressed about a child's behavior, murmurs, "Hmmm. He's black, isn't he?"[4]

a universe of presumption and assumption about an individual child, indeed about an entire socio-economic or racial/ethnic group is revealed.

Such totalizing statements might well be at least partially attributed to the emphasis in much social science research on conducting sweeping macro analyses which provide educators with broad generalizations. Socio-cultural territory is examined in terms of academic performance or at-risk characteristics of broadly-defined groups, typically ethnic minorities (Heath, 1983; Ogbu, 1978, 1979, 1981b; Philips, 1983), or in terms of class analyses which explore the lack of economic access and the social stratification of certain other groups, usually working class students (Willis, 1977; Fine, 1991).

Analyses of the micro-dynamics within the school as an entity have largely been left out of recent sociological accounts of education. Left out as well are accounts of how children manage the micro-dynamics of neighborhood and community.

Consider Jason, for example. Jason is a fifteen year old seventh grader of European-American heritage. He lives with his family in a subsidized housing project. Jason frequently sits outside of the assistant principal's office, awaiting punishment for aggressive actions. He has a difficult time not hitting when he is in a bad mood. His teachers describe him as a troubled boy.

Yet outside of school Jason contributes as a productive member of society. The following excerpt is from my field notes after a talk with Jason on one of the many occasions that he awaited sentencing.

> I ask Jason where he lives and he tells me, "The Z projects." Then he carefully takes a small velvet pouch with a drawstring out of his coat pocket and loosens the neck. He gently draws out a gold badge that looks like a police badge. He says that at night and on weekends, he works for the police department and patrols the elderly projects. He walks the streets and sidewalks looking for cars parked illegally in handicapped spaces and for kids riding their bikes through the projects. Then he reports them to the police department. I was amazed. Here was a boy who, by socio-economic and socio-cultural accounts, was 'poor white trash', with all of the stereotypes tied to such a label. But in his neighborhood, he was a moral force. (Field notes, lines 1201-1230)

Obviously Jason has a sense of right and wrong, appropriateness and inappropriateness. However, when he enters the school in a bad mood, and must manage ongoing interpersonal contact, there are limited ways for him to dispel the cloud. Generally, he says, he jokes around in class with his friends and sometimes that helps. Other times, he just lashes out. The one adult specifically designated by the institution to be an advocate for students, the school counselor, becomes one of the blockers rather than one of the helpers.

> Valerie: So you start out the day in a bad mood and then it just gets worse, probably.
>
> Jason: Sometimes. Sometimes it gets better.
>
> Valerie: Ok. Sometimes it gets better. What would help you, right at the beginning of the day, when you're in a bad mood?

Jason: Go see a counselor.

Valerie: Ok. Is that a possibility?

Jason: Yeah.

Valerie: Do you do it?

Jason: No.

Valerie: Why not?

Jason: Mr. Bluster doesn't like me (??). I looked at him, I asked him, I had to go to the bathroom before you brought me, and I looked at him, I said, "Mr. Bluster, can you bring me to the bathroom?" He goes, "I don't want to **see** you."

Valerie: That doesn't feel very good, does it?

Jason: (Looks down and shakes his head no) And then he kicked me out of the lunchroom today. For no reason. I was just sitting there and my friend gave me some nachos and he goes, "No, you didn't buy it, so get out of here." (Tape 19, lines 51-75)

Jason is not unique in his school experience. Many students, even some of those in the academically advanced track (the gifted and talented program), feel cornered, trapped, and persecuted by the institution. The feelings of persecution are located in those practices which have come to be called the hidden curriculum.

Such attitudes toward and perceptions of students help to create and perpetuate a particular organizational culture which is difficult to challenge and even more difficult to change. Particular aspects of the hidden curriculum which are mentioned consistently by both students and staff are comprised of: the stringent rules about attending to basic bodily functions such as when one

can urinate, how long one has to eat lunch, if one can stoop to slurp a drink of water as the line goes down the hallway; directed, segmented time management which allows virtually no time for non-academic social interaction; the practices of some staff which include publicly shaming or humiliating students or exhibiting racist or sexist behaviors; the general physical condition of the building itself; the limited space and time available to disperse pent-up energy; and the lack of external support given to the school in the form of materials, sports and fine arts.

Underlying Interactional Themes

A number of themes emerged which have to do with perceptions of the real underlying motivations behind interactions at Walnut School. These themes are particular to Walnut School but are, I think, by no means unique to school cultures. I have selected several of the predominant themes for presentation within this document (see Figure 2).

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Playing the Game

We're not going to
stand
here
while you waste
our time.

Do you hear me?

You **GET**
in your classroom **NOW!**

You have
NO respect
for
ANYone!

He
should have
thirty lashes, too. If we had that
as punishment,
he
wouldn't be
doing
that stuff
again.

(Comments made to/about students by teachers during passing time in the 7th grade hallway. Field notes, lines 155-165)

Figure 2. Comments in Hallway[5]

Both students and non-teaching staff express the belief that teachers hold the winning hand and all that can be done is to play the game as best one can. In an institution run on power relations, there are those who speak and those who listen. If the listeners fail to hear well enough, punishment is never far off, either in the form of rewards and privileges being withheld, verbal

harassment on an ongoing basis or referral to one of the assistant principals.

Although few teachers feel like they have much power at all and many are just as disheartened by the physical and psychic environment of the school as the students, nonetheless, teachers are viewed as the primary perpetrators of the negative atmosphere by many students and a number of staff. For example, according to one of the assistant principals,

> A teacher sent a boy to me and said he had touched a girl on her bottom. I checked with the girl and she said, "No, he didn't do that. He just pushed my chair with his feet. He didn't touch me like that." So there are two different stories of what happened. I believe the girl. But I can't just let it go at that. The teacher wants to know what I've done about it. Wants me to **nail** the kid. I want to use discipline as a way of improving students' behavior, not just to punish a kid. But they want me to nail these kids. . . . So they want me to play the game, I'll play their game. They want me to come down hard, I'll come down hard. What else can I do? I can't change things. If I were principal, maybe I could change some things. But I am just the assistant principal. That's all. (Field notes, lines 11-42)

Several students had similar thoughts.

> Alberto: The teachers in this school MAKE you respect them. If you try and say something to them, they say, "Stop or I'm going to write you up." You can't say anything or you'll get in trouble.
>
> Valerie: How would you change things if you could?
>
> Alberto: I'd change the teachers. (Field notes, lines 43-50)
>
> Johnny: Hey, when is it that learning about mediation starts?

Valerie: The beginning of May. Are you interested?

Johnny: Yeah. I want to do it.

Valerie: Ok, I'll put your name down. What are you here now for?

Johnny: I guess she (teacher) said I did something. She always sends me down here for something --my clothes aren't the right clothes or they're not on right or she thinks I did something that I didn't and so she sends me down here. I guess that's enough, though. I guess I'll play her game. She wants me to play her game, I'll play it. I want to be sitting on **that** side of the table next time. (Field notes, lines 65-89)

While student to adult conflictual interactions seldom effect student to student interactions in noticeably overt ways, they do significantly contribute to and shape the overall atmosphere of the school (Metz, 1978). The feeling of control and oppression is not a unique phenomenon, particular to Walnut School. Wexler (1992) conducted a three-year ethnography of three different high schools in different settings with significantly different student populations. His study of an urban underclass[6] high school reveals the same sort of adult to student interactional patterns, general atmosphere, student behaviors and status mechanisms which are present at Walnut, an urban underclass middle school.

Even though my task is not to demonstrate an overt, direct link between adult to student behavior and student to student interaction at Walnut, it is obvious that adult to student interactions provide strong and repetitive adult modeling of the ways and means by which power inequities

are sustained and sanctioned. With many Walnut students, physical might often equals right; with the staff, authoritative might equals right. Power lies in the ability to silence others by whatever means one has available.

There is a handful of teachers who abandon the power-based approach and carry out a more humanistic agenda. Mrs. Cruz, a teacher in the Spanish bilingual program says,

> You know, one day we were saying the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag and the kids wouldn't stand up or put their hands here (Mrs. C. puts her right hand over her heart) and I didn't say anything to them. I just put it away in my mind and later I did a lesson on it with them. We talked about what it meant to pledge allegiance and about respect and the next time we said the pledge, they were all standing and it meant something to them because now they understood it. I didn't lecture them about standing up and doing this or doing that. Now they understand. You know, I teach my kids values and they teach me. I say to them, "Forgive me," if I've done something wrong. We create values together. I teach respect. I respect them and they respect me. I don't need high heels and one of those loudspeakers to do that. (Field notes, lines 77-107)

Nonetheless, this alternate modeling is generally restricted to a few teachers at each grade level. It does not permeate every classroom. If anything, the discipline codes of the school have swung back toward the authoritarian, "The buck stops here" approach. Interestingly enough, although perhaps not coincidentally, the school committee, which has the largest number of staff participants, is the discipline task force.

Do You Hear Me?

Cornelia has been a secretary at the school for nearly twenty years. She has seen both the changing demographics --from an Irish-American neighborhood school to a predominantly Puerto Rican neighborhood school to an integrated school with approximately equal numbers of students of Puerto Rican, African-American and European-American heritages--and the changing disciplinary attitudes. She says,

> The kids have changed.
>
> Valerie: What do you mean?
>
> Cornelia: They pull things now that they would never have dared to pull back then.
>
> Valerie: Why do you think that is?
>
> Cornelia: I don't know.
>
> Valerie: How do you think the school is doing now?
>
> Cornelia: Oh, it's better.
>
> Valerie: What do you mean?
>
> Cornelia: Well, before they would go real easy on the kids. Now things have changed.
>
> Valerie: How have they changed?
>
> Cornelia: Well, if a kid does something wrong, they don't get away with it like they used to. It used to be like that when I first started. Mr. X., the principal then, would call a kid into his office and, you know, hit him. As long as there were witnesses. He could do that. Then after he left, things went downhill for quite a while. But Mr. Q (current principal), he's doing a good job.
>
> Valerie: If you could change one thing about the school, what would it be?

Cornelia: The intercom system. It NEVER works. Sometimes I have to go to the teachers' classrooms to get messages to them. (Field notes, lines 135-174)

Some researchers attribute the re-emergence of the authoritarian approach to discipline to the policies of the Reagan-Bush era (Wexler, 1992). This seems as plausible an interpretation of the phenomenon as any other and certainly suits my politics; however, it is beyond the scope of this study to critique such analyses. What is most relevant is the fact that staff and students repeatedly express a similar view--that the school is a punitive rather than a helping institution.

Cornelia and Mrs. Cruz identify a second theme which is echoed again and again by students and staff: there is a great deal of difficulty at Walnut with being heard by others. This theme cuts across groups and ranges from complaints about technology to interpersonal relations--from Cornelia's lousy intercom system, where there is often either no connection or a faulty one at best with individual classrooms, to the loudspeaker one of the assistant principals carries around to make **sure** she is heard, to teachers silencing one another face to face in order to get on with the business of education. Mrs. Cruz says,

> We have these meetings and what do we talk about? The curriculum. Being an accelerated school. Who cares? We need to talk about the KIDS. I lost my temper the other day. I had a student I needed to talk about. They said we didn't have time to talk about that. I lost my temper. I said, "You WILL listen to me. We WILL talk about

> this student. The kids are more important than anything else. They are why we're here--NOT the curriculum." And they listened. We've got very good teachers here. Very good teachers who can write wonderful lessons. But what do they do when the kids need help?! Sometimes they come to me and say, "Mrs. Cruz, how do you do it? You never seem to have any trouble with the students." I tell them, "That's because I love them. I treat them like they were my own children and they think of me as a mother." (Field notes, lines 89-119)

Students learn not to challenge being silenced. Experience has taught them that they will not be listened to and, in fact, will always be the losers if they do speak out. A number of participants expressed the same feeling as Peter, a seventh grade African-American student.

> That'll set a temper off, too. You in a whole, you in front of a whole bunch of people and, you talking to the teacher and, she'll holler. She'll talk **LOUD** so everybody can hear. All your friends sitting there. They talk loud so everybody can hear it. That'll get me going. I'll start yelling right back. But then, you say something, you're in the wrong, with the vice principal. Cause some vice principals think that the teacher wouldn't do that. That, teacher's always right. They don't **know** about some teachers. Some teachers do that and **know** the vice principal's gonna believe them. So they do one thing, then go back and tell them another thing. And you get in trouble for **that**, when they did something bad to **you**. Can't stand that. (Tape 29, lines 452-473)

Practically any student can list the adults within the school whom they feel treat young people with respect and it is always the same few staffpersons who are named. Students see few alternatives to coercive, punitive methods being enacted among or by most of the adult population of the school. They experience directly the rigid spheres of influence and interaction that give rise to the belief that

the school is an adversary, not an advocate and that learning how not to challenge adult power and authority is what is required to move from grade to grade. Witnessing and experiencing oppressive practices must make an impact ultimately on their own interactional systems as they enter adulthood (Miller, 1990).

The Fluidity of Boundaries

Silencing is significant for an essential reason: if a person is not allowed to speak, there is little chance of knowing him/her. It is through our speech, with its' linguistic and paralinguistic features, that we come to know one another well. Although earlier I noted some of the gaps in contemporary educational research, nonetheless, there are several ideas which have emerged that are especially pertinent to the present study.

A body of research continues to emerge which demonstrates the disabling effects of the mismatch or discontinuity between students' cultural background and the school practices. I tease out a concept which is a correlate to the discontinuity theory and call it the "fluidity of boundaries" theory.[7] This merely means that: (1) there is significant permeability in what is commonly perceived to be an impermeable boundary between the home/community and the school; and (2) that context is an important factor in the shaping of conflicted communication behavior.

The notion of permeability embraces the theory of cultural discontinuity but goes beyond it. While the neighborhood/community practices may bump into or struggle against the hidden curriculum and/or the mainstream practices of the school, that neighborhood/community culture nonetheless continues to be lived out within the school itself. Therefore, what transpires in Walnut School between students of all types can be seen in families and in neighborhoods as well. And what occurs in the neighborhoods and homes of students is carried into and carried on in the school. Given this permeability, how do adults enter into adolescents' daily worlds if those children do not speak about their worlds or only live them in the moments of passing between classes.

Angel, a sixth grader of Puerto Rican heritage, speaking about physical confrontations in school makes this connection with the world beyond the school doors:

> I mean, when a boy's gonna get in a fight, he has his friends around and the same thing with a girl. I also see this at my park, the park by my house, Z Park. There's a lot of fights over there. (tape 30, lines 40-45)

and

> I've seen parents, right, that, that, their kid got in a fight, their kid starting to fight somebody and instead of saying, "Get over here! Don't do stupid things like that!", they'll be like, "Get him! Get him! Come on! Get him! What did I teach you about fighting?" (Tape 30, lines 424-430)

This fluidity of boundaries is seldom recognized except in a cursory manner by practicing educators. One

Walnut teacher who conducted a study of the content of adolescent conflicts in the school during the 1993-94 school year said:

> I'm happy to say that using the analysis developed by X, I can say that the conflicts haven't changed in my classroom from what they were in the 1940s. It's still the same stuff that I'm after the kids for--throwing pieces of paper, pulling someone's hair. The same stuff. There's no difference. It's rare that I have deal with the problems of the '90s. But I am extraordinarily sensitive to the outside needs of my students. (Ms. Bluffy, Field notes, lines 217-229)

While the types of behavior described by this teacher--throwing paper, pulling hair--do flourish within the school, they are only a superficial manifestation of deeper and more complex interactions. They are really just the tip of the iceberg and by identifying them as the problems of the 1940s, the teacher effectively de-historicizes the students' place in time and neutralizes any critical reading of conflicted communication within the school. After all, kids are all the same, aren't they?

Grounded in Historicity

Wexler (1992, p. 33) also emphasizes the necessity of grounding any ethnographic study of education in its own historically unique specificity. While an in-depth historical analysis of youth conflicted communication practices would doubtless enrich my findings, such an endeavor is beyond the scope of the current study.

However, I do attempt to connect the school world of the students with the non-school social realities especially since one of my primary premises is that the patterning of conflicted communication is the result of: historical patterns which present themselves in different socio-cultural settings; historical conditions of external physical environments (the crowded government projects, a quiet street, the suburbs, the school); and contemporary social conditions such as the emergence of drug-related gangs.

Despite what Ms. Bluffy, the Walnut teacher, quoted earlier, deduced from her conflict survey of students' behaviors, her well-meant 'innocentization'[8] of adolescent conflict blights analyses of the intricate and sophisticated interplays between the inside world of the school and the outside world of the neighborhood and community.

The problems of the '90s do flourish within the school. Students bring their street experiences with them from the neighborhoods. They have seen strangers and friends killed, had knives pulled on them, been physically assaulted, live with drug-addicted parents, been shot at. They are adults' and each other's targets in ongoing demonstrations of racist, sexist and ageist behaviors.

The list of the problems of the '90s could go on. Suffice it to say that the boundaries--physical,

psychological and social--between the schoolhouse and the world surrounding it are far from impermeable.

End Notes

1. Other authors such as Mary Haywood Metz (1978) have conducted extensive analyses along these lines.

2. Structure is defined as reporting "salient patterning of the verbal (and non-verbal) form of the act or event" (Hymes, 1974, p. 61).

3. Although I do not develop the argument here, there are strong indications within my data that an entity such as a government housing project has qualities which would allow it to be characterized as an institution. I therefore consider the government projects as institutions for the purposes of this paper.

4. Stephen Haymes' (1995) book, *Race, Culture, and the City* challenges the social construction of 'race', stating that it is one of the most powerful categories for constructing mythologies about blacks--and other people of color, one might add.

5. The lashing remark is in reference to the decision by the Singapore government to lash an American youth, Michael Fay, for reportedly spray-painting a car.

6. Urban underclass is the current terminology in use. It identifies a segment of the population whose practices were thought to be described by the term, "culture of poverty" two decades ago.

7. Critical theorists talk about borders and boundaries but have a somewhat different use of the terms than that expressed in this paper. They use borders to refer to the closing of the educational doors on some groups as opposed to boundaries which groups can move through and even transform.

8. This is a coined term which alludes to the manner in which adults minimize children's issues in an ageist manner.

CHAPTER V

THE STUDENTS

An ongoing concern of mine throughout the design and the conduct of this research study has been to locate the practices (e.g., those patterned forms and content of conflicted communication) within a particular setting. Chapter IV therefore provides a grounding in the primary arena in which the data were collected; the current chapter provides the reader with insights about the youth practitioners of conflicted communication.

The Existence of Groups at Walnut

A relevant point of inquiry emerging out of the contemporary literature is being developed by those to the far left of the critical pedology[1]/critical theory school. Wexler looks at youth conflict not in terms of resistance or opposition to the existing class structure with the lower classes struggling to force out the class of elites but in terms of the co-construction of a collective social identity. He comments on:

> . . . the complexity and range of the discourses through which the antagonistic and complementary groups struggle over the realization of their cultural orientations during the practice of the accomplishment of the order of the school. We are discovering the struggle over the social resources of interaction, in which the power of identity formation through language, esteem and approval is itself being fought over - and the interactional methods through which the production of a valued social identity is collectively accomplished. (1992, p. 32)

This view corresponds well to the theoretical grounding of this study which I identified previously--that the social interactions of the youth subculture[2] are rooted in a conflictual struggle for power. The left of the left identify this conflictual struggle as the quest for the power to shape the collective identity.

The participants in my study identify the power component, especially in terms of an individual's actions. There is a strong reaction against an individual trying to be "all that."[3] And yet, individuals in the school work very hard at the sorts of behavior which will demonstrate to others that they really are "all that." The norm appears to be: You can be "all that," but don't be obvious about it.[4]

While there are a number of cliques within Walnut which one could say are actively trying to subvert the dominant paradigm, the members of which are shunted off into alternative programs, my data do not bear out the existence of the sorts of complementary and antagonistic groups which fit Wexler's parameters. A student might belong to a group, a 'posse', but these groups are not particularly static and are generally limited in size. They are friendship groups which have bonded through conflict or because of family ties rather than ideology.

Wexler's terminology implies stable boundaries (perhaps borders is a better word here) between groups which remain static in terms of form and functions in this

struggle for the power to shape the collective identity. But my field notes and interview texts bear out a strong tendency for groups to form, break apart and re-form, in all variety of manners.[5] This dynamic quality is dependent upon context, family affiliations, and intention.

For example, during the seventh month of the school year, several 8th grade girl groups began to develop. One of the assistant principals called a meeting of all 8th grade Black and Puerto Rican girls in order to nip any potential gang activity in the bud. The assistant principal's action was not unwarranted. She did not want consciously organized intimidation and conflict. There was already enough intimidation on a more random basis.

However, what was never explored was the reason these girl groups began to appear. Several times during the school year, small groups of students (usually girls) formed, gave their group a name, hung around together and then faded away. In the example below, the adult perception and the adolescent perspective collide head-on. While the assistant principal assumes that groups such as these are a negative force within the school and are generated along ethnic/racial lines, the young women refute her assumptions.

Asst.Prin.: And what are these groups that you all have? The Black girls against the Hispanic[6] girls?

Students: No, it isn't all just Black girls or Hispanic girls. It's mixed. There's Black girls and Hispanic girls and White girls, too.

Asst.Prin.: Well, what are these groups?

Students: One is NBA.

Asst.Prin.: What's that?

Students: No Bitches Allowed.

Asst.Prin: What's the other one?

Students: RQP. Reckin' Queen Posse.

Asst.Prin: Well, I don't understand why you need these groups. These groups are about segregation. We've moved past that. We're about integration. We're all mixed together. I'm Black, but I've got Irish blood in me. Some people think I'm Hispanic, if they don't know me. How can you tell by looking at people anymore. You can't. So let's have unity. Let's not have any more of these titles. (Field notes, lines 291-340)

This group fluidity is apparent in gatherings of children of all ages and is interpreted by child development theorists as being part of the learning process involved in socialization (Farley-Lucas, Hale, & Tardy, 1993).

In a setting like Walnut School, which offers so few opportunities for youth to have a name for themselves which says something about who they are (beyond their ethnic/racial categorizations) and to what heights they aspire, groups like the NBA or the RQP are essential. They provide a rallying point and a valid social membership. It is not the groups themselves which are at fault, it is a system which provides so little chance for youth to experiment with a range of behaviors and memberships in a

safe environment. If such spaces and places are not provided for youth, they will create their own.

Unless a student is in the gifted and talented track, is in the band, or is a mediator, there are few other venues in which to establish a flexible or enhanced range of individual identity. An individual's identity is confined to and defined by location and opportunity, and is not necessarily constructed out of the way an individual regards her- or himself but is certainly constructed out of the manner in which she/he is regarded by others.

So Let's Have Unity

What is curious about the assistant principal's remarks is that they belie the fact that the young women have clearly integrated themselves, at least in terms of ethnic/racial heritage. But no blanket statements can be made about group cohesion or affiliation and ethnicity/race within the school. Nicole contradicts the statements made during the eighth grade girls' meeting mentioned above. She talks about very broadly-defined groups which have been forming socially among this cohort since the sixth grade and which do seem to be assembled along ethnic/racial lines.

> Basically, it (the girls' groups) is just the Blacks and Puerto Ricans. The guys are a little more mixed--but not really. Mostly it's just the Black guys who go to the gym and all the Puerto Rican guys play handball. I don't know about the rest of them. They're just lost. Basically, with Melissa and Lulu's group, all the Black girls would be with that. There's no other group

> for Black girls. Actually, there's a couple of Puerto Rican girl groups. Because there's, like, the girls who take bilingual [Spanish/English instructional program] are separate from the rest of them. They don't hang around together outside or anything. (Tape 11, lines 126-143)

Certainly, there are numerous examples throughout my field notes of ethnic/racial mixing in dyads and groups. Dyads and groups are not exclusive. They cohere because of similar interests, neighborhood proximity, parental friendships, and family connections. In fact, when the assistant principal assembled all of the Black and Puerto Rican eighth grade girls and asked the Black girls to sit on one side of the auditorium and the Puerto Rican girls to sit on the other side, the girls themselves rebelled and said they did not like the separation. Girls from each side got up and moved to the opposite side of the room, asking as they did so why none of the White girls were present.

Establishing Homogeneity

But in general Nicole's assessment of the dominant group compositions is accurate, at least for the 8th graders. This is not to say that there are not smaller alliances--there are. But these alliances are based on friendships, not necessarily on the desire to be part of the broader social action.

The 6th and 7th grades do not have the broadly-constructed dominant groups found in grade eight. They have numerous smaller groups or associations. There are no

prominent group leaders who have consistent status and power except perhaps among some of the 7th grade boys.

These grade level differences are significant because they indicate movement toward the sort of social identity formation identified in Wexler's three high school studies. Stratification along particular socially constructed categories begin to manifest in the 8th grade. This emergence has repercussions for the high school interactions which are to come and into which many students with older siblings are already being socialized.

Re-forming Group Membership

What is significant with respect to the notion of "group" itself (not the broadly-defined groups in Nicole's description, but the smaller friendship groups) is the manner in which a group re-forms itself and the factors which influence that re-formation. During periods of active, protracted conflicted communication, the unconscious drive toward homogeneity becomes a creative force.

Groups that start out with no distinctive ethnic/racial homogeneity oftentimes re-align along ethnic/racial lines during a conflict event. Thus, while the conflict act/event may enhance group solidarity initially, if the conflict remains in an active phase for any length of time, the group begins to use that active phase to re-form itself into a more homogeneous unit. That

is, those members who have the least in common with the primary disputants begin to peel off.

While homogeneity appears to be defined in terms of ethnicity/race, this is deceptive. What unifies a group in a conflicted event is mutual interdependence, trust and reliability. The family is the most trustworthy and reliable social unit for many students; since family members often share similar physical characteristics, we assume that homogeneous alliances are constructed along ethnic/racial lines when in actuality, at the most basic level, they are based on family allegiances.

Groups that start out being ethnically/racially homogeneous almost invariably re-align along family of origin lines. Groups that start out with familial homogeneity rarely re-align but move into conflict episodes other family groups, who may or may not share the same ethnic/racial background.

The resulting norm seems to be that re-alignment will continue until the greatest degree of group homogeneity is established: therefore, the greatest degree of trustworthiness and reliability. And re-alignment means that affiliative conflict group membership will continue to transform (if the conflict episode warrants it) until the disputants are surrounded by members from the most essential unit: the family.

Some research studies support this finding, suggesting that Black and Hispanic Americans[7] are more oriented toward

the family and group than the more individually focused White American child (Phinney & Rotheram, 1987; Burger, 1973; Mock & Tuddenham, 1971; Dore, 1958) although others do not (Halpin, et al., 1980; Preston, 1972). While my data do not demonstrate that White American children are less group-affiliative due to ethnic socialization practices, they do demonstrate that White children do not invoke extensive family networks when engaging in conflicted communication.

The reasons for this may be a combination of family socialization practices or a lack of the necessary social ingredients such as an available extended family system within the school or community. Some White students are affiliated with a peer social network which they can and do call upon for back-up.

In many families, Black, Puerto Rican and White, it is vital for family members to understand and embrace the importance of backing each other up. Students without family back-up (in the form of older young relatives or adults) oftentimes wisely bow out of the active conflicted communication scene. Or, if they become active participants, they attempt to make sure they have such a solid relationship with a friend(s) so that they will never have to stand alone.

Consider the following examples, one given by Michelle, an African-American 6th grader with "mad" (tough, numerous and willing to fight) family back-up; one given by

Mickie, a White 6th grader with peer but no family member back-up in Walnut; and the third by Jamey, also a White 6th grader with no family and no Walnut peer back-up.

> Michelle: And my sister, well, she's 30 now, well 31. But when she was going to school, she never made it to high school, but middle school, a girl pulled out a knife on her and she cut her leg. So she got a big mark that's still there now. And so my cousins, when they started going to school, they started, they all go to the same school--all their cousins, so when somebody mess with them, we're there to back everyone up. (Tape 3, lines 1092-1103)
>
> Mickie: I mean, you have other friends in the world, but there's just one friend that will stick by you and stand up for you like Kendra would. (Tape 16, lines 682-686)
>
> Jamey: But the only best friend that I have is the one I had in elementary school. We've stuck by each other through everything. And, I mean, if they were like that, I mean, I'd stick by them. But they're not what I thought they would be. (Tape 16, lines 667-674)

While it is a lonely thing to have no family at one's school, since so much social relating revolves around who has more back-up, it is even lonelier to have no dependable friendship group to back one up. Back-up is the social capital that allows a student to function not only actively but safely as a participating member of the adolescent social scene.

Who is Involved in Conflict?

When youth move between schools, showing up at locations other than those to which they are assigned, it is usually to carry out the duties of back-up person.

Often throughout the year students would make it known that some older, bigger student from another school was coming to Walnut School to "jump" them (beat them up because of an unfair advantage). Confronted with this type of news, students usually feel that they need to leave school or get there much earlier or later than they normally would--that is, if they decide to attend school at all. Families must then find alternative means of transportation if the threatened student walks or takes the school bus so there is no danger of the youth being jumped en route.

According to the Committee for Children, a non-profit organization working toward the prevention of child abuse and youth violence, 160,000 children per day miss school because of the fear of being beaten up (1994). This is not surprising. The correlation at Walnut School between involvement in an active conflict and their subsequent absence from school, their intentional orchestration of placement in in-house suspension or their haunting of safer school spaces such as the counselors', nurse's or administrative offices is too strong to be merely coincidental.

It appears that many of the European-American students in the school are seldom seen in the mediation office. Indeed, some of the students who pass through the mediation office doors consider European-American students to be fairly invisible and are seldom involved in conflicts. However, this is not the case. There is roughly an equal

number of mediations involving students from all three of the predominant ethnic groups at Walnut. Those students who are rarely seen are the handful of Vietnamese youth and those in the bilingual program.

This perceived invisibility of the European-American students may perhaps be due to two primary reasons. Because Walnut houses a Talented and Gifted Program which primarily serves European-American students who are grouped together in a separate track, it appears to the interested observer, that a body of White students is beyond the nitty-gritty, day-to-day struggles in which the rest of the school engages--a perception which quantitative data do not bear out.

The second reason may be that some European-American students may utilize somewhat different conflict patterns as or may utilize the predominant conflict patterns in different ways than many of the Puerto Rican and African-American students. These differences are not visible until differently-socialized students are engaged in a conflict and find that there are divergent expectations and behavioral norms being enacted.

Some students are aware of differences and use them to their own advantage while others try to emulate dominant school patterns. Jamie, the young Black/Puerto Rican man, has been exposed to a variety of different social contexts in his home life. In a conversation with Christina, he

makes the connection between economics and conflict patterns, putting ethnicity/race aside.

Christina: Never see--with **White** people, I never seen nothing happen with them.

Jamie: White people don't even fight.

Christina: They talk it out.

Jamie: Not that I see around.

Christina: It's between Blacks and . . .

Jamie: Unless they live around here (government projects) or where my father lives at (downtown Summerfield subsidized housing). Then they'll be fighting. But around where my mom lives, they'll be like (imitates White voice/actions), "Oh, I'm sorry, man. Oh, gosh, I feel so bad, man." (Tape 27, pp. 17-18)

Jamie goes on to make connections between racism, White fear and intergroup conflict patterns as he describes a situation near his mother's house.

I live in, like, a real quiet neighborhood. And one time, on Halloween, check this out, on Halloween, I was trick or treating with my cousins, all right? And I was running around with my bag, right, and my mask. And some kid out of nowhere said, "Hey! Ugly!"

Valerie: Did you turn around?

Jamie: With a quickness. So, "WHO YOU TALKING TO?" They's like, "I'm talking to YOU!" And we said, "Yeah, you'll find out." And we left. Then, later on, we seen him that night and I ran up to him and took off my mask and I was like, "NOW WHO'S UGLY? DO YOU THINK I'M UGLY NOW?" And he's like, "No, no, no, no, no!" All right? And then I told him, "Well, tell me I look good!" Right? Just to make him look stupid, you know. He was like, "OH! OH! You a good-looking kid! You a good--" I was like, "EEEYOO! You nasty. I'm gonna kick your--" All right? I started getting him confused and stuff.

Right? Then my cousin, he was like, "Hit him! Hit him! Hit him!" Right? And the kid was like, "I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I'm sorry!" And I'm a lot smaller than that kid, too. The kid is like, tall and fat. He could have hurt me, for real. He was like, "I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I didn't mean it! I didn't mean it!" And I just stepped at him real quick, right. And he jumped back and I said, "Yeah. Next time watch who you're calling ugly." All right? And he was like, "Okay, okay, okay." Right? And he was halfway crying by now. It was funny, but, I mean. . . . Cause that's what, I mean over there, they won't fight you. They'll just tell you sorry or something. They'll be like . . .

Valerie: Why do you think it's different?

Jamie: Cause their moms teach them different. **NO!** Cause their moms teach them, if you see a Black kid in this neighborhood to watch yourself. I've seen my cousin, I mean, not my cousin but one of my friends who I consider a cousin, I've seen his mother, like before, tell him stuff like that. And I would just look at her and she knows I would get mad. And he was like, "She don't mean nothing by that to you, man. She don't mean nothing." Can't believe it. (Tape 27, pp. 19-22)

While the mediation data reveal more intra-group or African-American to Puerto Rican conflict situations at Walnut, there is a general feeling among students that most conflict lines are not drawn along ethnic boundaries. Edwardo says the following in response to my question about who fights whom.

> When they fight, it don't matter what your race is. They want to fight you, they'll fight you. Because I've seen it, Blacks picking on a White, Puerto Ricans picking on a Black. (Tape 30, lines 112-116)

But even though none of the mediations center around racism, the hallways are often filled with racial

identifiers which are used by students and teachers alike. Peter describes the situation this way,

> You can't walk nowhere without hearing nobody say, "I'm gonna get that Puerto Rican," or "I'm gonna get that Black kid," "Look at that White boy walking down the hall." They can't be, you know what I'm saying, say his name is Billy--"Look at **Billy** walking down the hall." Gotta be a **White** boy or something like that. (Tape 39, page 4)

Although none of the mediations or intake sessions which I taped or described in my field notes name racial comments as the conflict trigger, this is not to say that such comments do not trigger acts and events; it is only to say that the students do not name them as such. With older people, however, the lines of allegiance drawn around members of the same ethnic group appear to grow more rigid. The following excerpt is taken from a conversation between Jamie, Christina and me. Jamie says,

> If it's a Puerto Rican fighting a Black, they'll do things a whole lot different than a Puerto Rican fighting a Puerto Rican.

Valerie: Yeah?

Christina: Probably be a rumble. Shooting.

Jamie: If it was a Puerto Rican fighting a Puerto Rican, they'll probably fight like this--(J. puts his fists up in front of his face)--with hands, than if it was a Puerto Rican fighting a Black, they'll probably shoot, like, cause both of them. Sometimes Puerto Ricans will shoot each other. Most of the times, they don't, cause they think, like, "We got to make sure we keep our own . . . alive", you know. At least, that's how my cousins are. (Tape 27, pages 7-8)

Again, the reasons for this more rigid allegiance to ethnic/racial groupings as people age may have to do with developmental changes.[8] It may also have to do with environmental-social differences between the school as a unifying site where oppressive measures are forced upon youth by identifiable adults, and the neighborhood where it is more difficult to name either oppressive persons or oppressive system-level causes and effects. In the search for a scapegoat, it becomes easy to name one's differently-pigmented neighbor as the problem.

Developmental Aspects of Conflicted Communication

There is little critical writing on youth subcultures coming out of the U.S. as of yet. What literature is available deals mainly with ethnicity and uses sociological approaches to define broad group practices (Phinney & Rotheram, 1987). Little research is available which recognizes "the way that individuals 'make meaning' from their experiences as a consequence of their developmental status" (Spencer, 1987, p. 105). Other literature, such as ethnographies of schooling, chiefly address micro-settings, for example, an individual classroom within a school. Thus, while the findings of these studies are grounded in a naturalistic approach, the school, the community and the broader society are seldom considered in the analysis.[9]

Critical analyses also generally neglect any mention of the developmental aspects of youth conflicted

communication. As with most other discussions of research with children, there is a glaring need for more longitudinal studies of conflicted communication--at the individual, the family and the group level.

According to Phinney and Rotheram (1987, p. 291), there has been almost no research on childhood and adolescent acquisition of the values, attitudes, and behavior patterns associated with ethnic group membership. The same statement could be made of the focus of this study--the socialization of adolescent youth in conflict. Exploration of the manners in which adolescents from diverse ethnic backgrounds but experiencing similar socio-economic situations carry out conflicted communication within a school setting finds few research precedents.

Although few cross-age studies of youth conflict have been conducted, what little is available through comparative analyses of research on like-aged groups indicates that there is age differentiation with respect to the content and forms of conflict. Participants in my study have no doubt that there is a difference. Michelle, the young woman quoted previously, says:

> I know cause since I got lots of cousins that go to school, I mean, high school. They come and talk to me saying that when I get in high school, this and this might happen, girls get jealous.

Valerie: Does your cousin think it's different being in high school than in middle school?

Michelle: Yeah. Because the girls, then they get older, they get into a higher grade, they'll

be acting like they're bigger and badder than anybody else. (Tape 3, lines 892-929) We may have more fights in middle school. Because they like, they not older yet so they don't know all this stuff. I was gonna say elementary school because they little kids and little kids, they just be, they fight over little things, over toys and things. So really middle school.

Valerie: Why do you think that happens in middle school?

Michelle: 'Cause thing, when somebody gets in a higher grade in middle school, right, they'll be thinking they're badder then since they older and they will be, like to pick on people. Say eighth graders, they like to pick on us sixth graders because they older than us. (Tape 3, lines 945-973)

Admittedly, the focus on the developmental nature of events related to children is not a new insight. Such a point of view enabled various well-known child development social scientists, including Freud, Piaget, Maslow, Kohlberg, Kegan, Gilligan, and Belenky, et al., to devise their respective schema of child/human development. Erikson (1968), especially, stresses the critical importance of a child's social relationships and stresses the cultural context in which identity (and, I might add, practices) evolves. More same-age as well as longitudinal studies which consider important developmental shifts have yet to be carried out if our understanding of the shifts inherent in conflicted communication practices is to improve.

But the reading of the term "developmental" must be readdressed. Contained within the traditional reading is the assumption of a linear acquisition of those

characteristics and skills which comprise adult-ness. In short, the child's reasoning and acts grow ever more complex, sophisticated and adult-like. Such is the adult-centered view of child development (Thorne, 1986).[10]

I propose instead that adolescent conflicted communication is developmental in the sense that it is continually evolving in its own right, rather than it is evolving in a linear fashion toward adult forms. Youth conflicted communication both works toward incorporating adult patterns and manifests its own internal logic. Each age-stage of conflicted communication has its own internal complexity. This quality is not restricted to adults only.

But how those complexities reveal themselves and what they represent is often left unexamined when an adult-centered interpretation of youth systems is taken for granted initially. Spencer (1987, p. 105), for example, states that if the research on Black child identity is "examined developmentally and the constructs subcategorized multidimensionally . . . , nontraditional conclusions are generated. Children are viewed then as unique and qualitatively different from adults." The same statement could be applied to age-specific conflict research.

In addition, an adult-centered perspective leaves no room to consider the possibility that adult practices may be influenced by and re-formed due to youth influences. An extreme example of a certain type of re-formation is presently occurring in Summertown. Five years ago, the

stirrings of drug-related gang activities began to influence the patterns of conflicted communication as young people were drawn into the groups. Adults and children began to modify their interactions based on fear of random assaults by drug gang members. Parents who typically kept their children inside the home are even more vigilant now.

Children, too, have learned that it is dangerous even to look at other people nowadays. If they are outside, they know they must keep their eyes and heads down and do nothing which might be construed as an affront or a challenge. Older youth teach younger youth to mind their own business, which means to keep to themselves.

The usual flow of conflicted communication is in a period of flux and silencing, at least within the broader community where individuals' allegiances are not always known. The appearance of gang-related incidents within the middle school has not yet manifested in any extreme ways, but there is a strong concern among the staff that incidents will soon begin to occur. At present, most of the students seem not to be impressed by the overt claims of gang membership voiced by some students.

Making versus Taking a Problem.

In my attempt to focus on adolescent-specific complexity, I chose not to utilize a problem-focused approach. Rather than "taking on a research problem" already identified by teachers or administrators--for

example, student deviance as in the case of aggressive Black boys[11]--I have attempted to 'make a research problem'. In the words of Fuller, my goal has been to "make the everyday exotic and to take nothing for granted in the ordinary worlds being studied" (1983, p. 185).

Granted, my site and participants are perhaps not as ordinary as one might wish, in the respect that, from a traditional perspective, they already characterize deviance just by being part of the inner city setting and thus are often 'made into the problem' by educationalists and policy makers. But, if one avoids the problem-taking mindset, one is able to see the ordinariness, the commonality of behaviors and choices among youth in the inner city--choices and behaviors which arise out of their setting and their conditioning. Consequently, I can note similarities in my findings and those of a study by Fuller (1983) in a large, multi-racial comprehensive school in a London borough.[12]

End Notes

1. In fact, Wexler is so far left he does not call himself a critical or even radical pedagogue.

2. This is the terminology used in the literature.

3. This expression and its meaning is addressed at length in a subsequent section. Briefly, it means, "acting as if you are better than others". There is strong social sanction against thinking one is "all that," though being all that is the pinnacle of social achievement.

4. Being **all that** is a theme which is addressed at length in Chapter VII, page xxx.

5. This formation and reformation of group alliances will be examined in greater depth. Perhaps the reason for the differences between Wexler's findings and mine can be found in the developmental differences between high school and middle school students.

6. The boundaries of groups along the lines of ethnicity are not clear. Oftentimes, students identified themselves according to all of their gene pools, but prefaced that genetic identity with their dominant ethnic social affiliation. For example, Nicole says of herself, "I'm Light Nicole. People call me that because there's Black Nicole. But I'm Black because I live with my dad and he's Black. But my mom's White." Ogbu (1974) has documented the significant proportion of children who label themselves differently from their official public school classification.

7. While the term "Hispanic" is used, it makes within-group differences invisible. Lewis (1975) found that Puerto Rican Americans are less group oriented than Mexican Americans.

8. J. S. Phinney and M. J. Rotheram (1987) have edited a work which pulls together a good deal of diverse information on the socialization of children's ethnic identities and attitudes. They also address developmental aspects of this process.

9. Obviously, there are exceptions to this statement which can be found in the work of Heath (1983), Philips (1983), Rivera and Nieto (1993).

10. There is disagreement in the literature on child development and adolescence about who acts upon and socializes whom. Conventional notions of socialization and views of children as 'adults-in-the-making' are being critiqued and re-visioned. For a review of current efforts, see Barrie Thorne (1986, p. 176, notes 5 & 6).

11. M. Beale Spencer states that "African American children and youth have been studied, for the most part, in a reactive mode. The term *reactive* refers to the research focus of many majority scholars that begins with assumptions of deviance and pathology in minority status persons. Too often, the research of many majority scholars is geared toward reaffirming pathological assumptions" (1987, p. 105).

12. For example, one theme is the familial restrictions placed on young women and their responses to these restrictions, including the acquisition of characteristics of "toughness." (Such toughness is

demonstrated in my study by gaining and maintaining a reputation for being a fighter.) (Fuller, 1983, p. 171)

CHAPTER VI

YOUTH CONFLICTED COMMUNICATION THEORY: DEFINITIONS AND FRAMEWORK

The challenge which has emerged within the fields of communication and applied linguistics is to carry through on attempts to extend the trend toward "increasingly more interactive and dialogically conceived notions of contextually situated talk" (Goodwin & Duranti, 1992, p. 1), moving beyond analyses focused at the sentence level and at level of the isolated focal event.

In the 1960s, Hymes and Gumperz broke wide open the notion that language was an encapsulated formal system which could be analyzed separately from the rest of a society's culture and social organization. However, while many studies have been conducted since the 1960s which connect language to the local social setting, few attempt critical analyses which locate the local talk in the broader social structures.

Despite this particular gap within the communication and applied linguistics fields, conflict studies is a good deal further behind in the game. Because there are few naturalistic studies of conflict available, the ways in which conflict is constituted and organized by various groups has been inadequately explored. Consequently, there is little grounded theoretical construction of either the

structured patterns of conflict or its social functionality.

These gaps have resulted in mainstream notions which define conflict as a time-bound, linear, ends-means sort of phenomenon. Conflict has not been examined as an operational system which enables individuals and groups to carry out social functions. Nor, as with communication studies of talk, has conflict studies attempted to explore the ways in which local, micro-levels of conflict are connected to broader macro-level structures.

Therefore, within this chapter, I will present a meta-theoretical framework which incorporates the notion that adolescent conflict is fluid, recursive, historical, and not bound by time or place. Each of the following orienting constructs--situation, event, act, trigger--used within the framework will be examined. I will also argue that adolescent conflict is actually conflicted communication: youth conflict is a communicative social activity which builds and re-builds relationships as opposed to being a destructive activity of miscommunication. Finally, I will explore the way in which context is an active force in youth conflicted communication.

The Nature of Youth Conflicted Communication

Those characteristics which distinguish the definition of conflict in my setting from other definitions of

conflict are its recursiveness, its historicity and its susceptibility to context. All of these characteristics combined with the non-tangible realms of tension, fear, excitement and power; the semi-tangible realms of words, interpersonal alliances, re-alliances and oppositions; and the tangible realm of concrete physical acts give adolescent conflicted communication its fluid quality. There is often a feeling that one can't quite get one's hands around it.

The particular ways in which these characteristics and realms interact give conflicted communication (or what Simmel calls antipathy) its "extent and combination . . . (and) the rhythm of its appearance and disappearance" (1955, p. 20). The extent, combinations, rhythms and content of this conflicted communication system allow youth to "produce their small-group society and its structure as dual aspects of a single, situated phenomenon" (Maynard, 1985a, p. 210).

Specific Dualities of Conflicted Communication

According to Simmel (1955, p. 20) ". . . what at first glance appears in [life] as dissociation, actually is one of its elementary forms of sociation." However, Simmel distinguishes between relations of conflict and unifying forces and believes that the alternation of sociation and dissociation produces a social structure.

I propose, instead, that within the situations in this study, the production of small-group society through conflicted communication simultaneously contains both elements of dissociation and sociation, and of cooperation and competition (Maynard, 1985a). It is out of the simultaneous manifestation of these dualities that the seemingly evasive quality of adolescent conflict is constituted; for, at the same time that participants are dissociating and competing via conflict structures, they are within that very same process, cooperating to create new forms of sociation.

Maynard supports this thesis, stating that:

> social organization achieved through conflict is momentary and susceptible to change. It represents an alliance of interests around some issue, some practical problem that emerges in local interaction. When the problem changes, so may the organization of the group. (1985a, p. 210)

For example, in one interaction--a single, situated phenomenon--dissociation may have separated two students who were previously involved only peripherally through their respective friendship alliance with two parties who had been disputing; but, at the same time that a previous conflict act is still determining responses, some new act occurs which suddenly turns the two dissociaters into collaborators. Thus the students are simultaneously engaging in structured patterns of both conflict dissociation and sociation that produce society. There is

no chicken or egg argument to be made. It is rather a case of both/and.

Unbounded Time as a Characteristic

My data also clearly indicate that youth conflicted communication is not a timebound phenomenon but is, as Strathern (1985) says, an ongoing process of power adjustment that can never have a real end--except in the sense that an old conflict is replaced by a new one, with new conditions, a new social reality, a new definition of relationships and relative power (Marshall, 1990, p. 119). And, indeed, the existence of these relatively active and quiescent phases[1] is documented throughout my data.

Historicity as a Characteristic

Conflicted communication, therefore, is a mixed bag of lived interactional devices, vocal and nonvocal, that become an operating culture (Goodenough, 1971, p. 110). This operating culture is

> . . . a small activity system providing relevant social identities for participants, a set of relevant actions for them to perform, and a formulation of the types of events they are engaged in. In addition to being this cultural organization, the utterance functions to shape the behavior of the participants into a particular type of coordinated action, and makes relevant specific types of future action (Goodwin, 1987, p. 232).

The typical laboratory research design has limited access to an operating culture and consequently is limited in its ability to examine the longitudinal, historical

dimensions and relational repercussions of conflicted communication activities. Perhaps structured patterned responses can be detected more clearly in laboratory settings where a conflict is contrived and actions and reactions are limited and controlled by the setting and the design parameters of the experiment.

But when the researcher enters a naturalistic setting, conflicts gets messy. To make structuralist statements about what is occurring in the multiple interactions which revolve around and evolve out of a particular conflict trigger or act set in a laboratory is to be less than accurate. It is a cherry pie without the filling. Rather, it is the analysis of behavior in the local social setting and consideration of the local setting's enfoldment within the broader social setting which allows the peculiarities particular to the group being observed to emerge.

Naturalistic data collection necessarily forces the examination of the traditional assumption that interpersonal and group conflict is restricted to the primary disputing individuals or groups. On the basis of my fieldwork, I propose rather that conflicted communication among adolescents is seldom an exclusive, static, bounded, one-on-one or group-on-group occurrence. There is typically the involvement of multiple parties as well as the foregrounding of new individuals and backgrounding of primary disputants--all of which is accomplished through the simultaneous existence of

unifying, dis-unifying, cooperative and competitive elements, making adolescent conflict a very slippery catch of fish to try and string neatly.

The Importance of Context

In the same way that the controlled research design within conflict studies has limited access to the more shadowy aspects of the conflict organizational system, so too have communication studies limited the access to the broader framework of conflict by focusing on decon-textualized, isolated focal events. For this reason, there is a great deal of literature on the structured features of argumentation, for example, but little understanding of the placement of arguments within the broader conflict framework or of their interaction with the field of action--the context--within which an exchange is embedded.

Goodwin and Duranti address the importance of context, stating,

> the focal event cannot be properly understood, interpreted appropriately, or described in a relevant fashion, unless one looks beyond the event itself to other phenomena (for example cultural setting, speech situation, shared background assumptions) within which the event is embedded, or alternatively that features of the talk itself invoke particular background assumptions relevant to the organization of subsequent interaction. (1992, p. 3)

The notion of context is especially relevant to this study and will be considered at greater length further on. At this point, however, suffice it to say that the typical isolation of focal events for scrutiny is understandable.

Such a strategy allows a researcher to get his/her hands around a slice of interaction, squeezing out as much structural juice and pulp as possible. But, one must also ask what has happened to the fruit tree.

Figure 3 illustrates the continuous, emergent, and shifting nature of adolescent conflicted communication. While any attempt to depict adolescent conflict visually will necessarily limit and confine its' scope by the very fact that it is a representation of data which are filtered through my own epistemological lens, nonetheless a visual metaphor may help to ground intellectual constructs.

Conflicted Communication: A Definition

The ideas of several authors who are mentioned below have contributed to the construction of a view of conflicted social interaction which I find best illuminates the social sphere in which I conducted my research. But this view was not arrived at without a number of intellectual wrestling matches. At first, I thought it was important to try to pin my data to one or another notions of the human condition. Consequently, I put the idea of humans as fundamentally cooperative in a head-lock. My data sat in the stands, unmoved.

I put the idea of humans as fundamentally conflictual in a half-nelson. My data crossed their arms and gazed at the ceiling. Then I grappled with the notion that society operates in an 'either/or" mode: conflict or cooperation

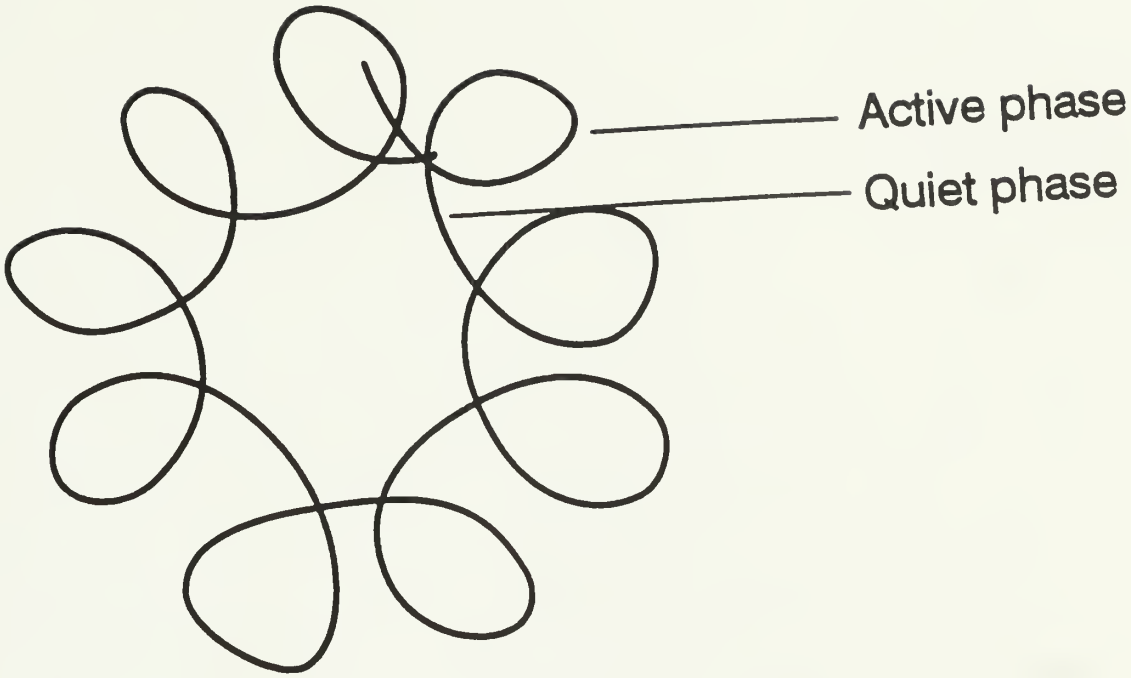

Figure 3. Conflict Situation Spiral

and; cooperation or competition with conflict sprinkled around (Deutsch, 1983). My data started to gather their coats and hats. I was in a tight spot and found myself being outmaneuvered by a group of socio-linguistic constructions.

Then I considered the idea that there are dissociating forces and unifying forces and it is the interplay between the two that constitutes a concrete, living social unit (Simmel, 1955, p. 20). This notion seemed more in line with my data. But I push the concept to more extreme limits and propose that the living social system is driven towards and by sociation and dissociation simultaneously. How these dual aspects of sociation and dissociation reveal

themselves not only within discrete pairs of utterances but also within the content of conflicted communication is a thread which runs throughout this paper.

While the conflict theorists from whom I have borrowed ideas and terminology (Coser, 1956; Simmel, 1955; Maynard, 1985a, 1985b; Strathern, 1985; Marshall, 1990) do not use the term conflicted communication, nonetheless, I feel it is an appropriate term given the organization of conflict among the participants in this study. It is important to recognize and acknowledge early on that the participants in my study communicate very clearly within their conflicts, despite the popular belief that "conflict is almost universally perceived as a negative occurrence, a blemish on what most people expect should be the smooth operation of a well-ordered life" (Weeks, 1992, p. 4).

Such a belief would appear to be located in the cooperative view of human society which accordingly must define any interaction which does not enhance cooperation as a misperception or a miscommunication. The implication is that "miscommunication" or "misperception" can be resolved into "communication" and "perception." This is very much a cause and effect sort of logic and while it can work in certain settings under certain circumstances, it is an inadequate frame for the setting in which I conducted my research.

Judging other people's communicative activities to be forms of miscommunication or misperception can be

problematic, especially if the outsider is not grounded in the social reality of those being mediated and/or researched. Oftentimes an outsider's point of view about what constitutes communication and perception (and what the two are accomplishing within the social interactions) are constructed differently from the conflict participants' views. This difference may be attributable to a variety of factors including, but not limited to or confined by age, socio-economics, ethnicity, or gender.

At various points in time when I was mediating conflict situations, my perception was that two disputants were "misperceiving" each other. When I would attempt to gather the reins of the interactions as any good mediation jockey is expected to do, the disputants would turn to me and reassure me that nothing was going to happen, they were "just talking." It often turned out that I was the misperceiver, not the two disputants.

There were also numerous instances where I believed that I was communicating and it became quite obvious that I was not. This miscommunication may have been the result of something as (seemingly) simple as my choice of a phrase or something as complex as the exposure of my own hidden agenda of socially desirable behavior. In any case, the miscommunication was not between the students, it was between the mediator and the students.

Most students know (although some students may have a much more sophisticated knowledge than others) what

particular movements, words and attitudes signify and they react accordingly. Communication in their conflict is well-choreographed and choices are based on information available at the moment--that is the verbal and nonverbal displays which take place as participants face each other as well as the historical and contemporary shape of contextualization cues.

While there may be varying degrees to which any student is able to draw upon the dominant forms of contextualized conflicted communication at Walnut School, this matter of degree depends upon numerous factors such as individual choice or contextual shifts which cannot necessarily be used as predictors of behavior--unless a student has consciously placed him- or herself completely outside the realm of the dominant patterns which is another matter altogether. But this issue will be taken up in a successive section.

At this point, suffice it to say that, while the conflicted communication of the adolescent participants often produces feelings of fear or tension and demonstrations of intolerance or domination, communication nevertheless is clearly occurring. Thus, the term conflicted communication[2] will be used to describe the conflict interactions of the participants in this study. Conflicted communication places the emphasis on the communicative aspects of conflict rather than presenting a

limiting and flattened affect of conflict as miscommunication, misperception, or misinformation.[3]

I am not proposing that this notion of conflicted communication fits every conflict situation at any given time. This sort of universalist statement would negate the foundational (and fundamental) wrestling matches in which I have been engaged for the past months. If such universalism were the case, I could easily have settled for any one of the definitions of conflict presented in the literature and fitted my data into it, nicely and neatly, with a hammer and a few nails. Unfortunately, I have rather unruly data which kept speaking up, loudly, when I tried to cut corners.

And while I do not claim to have focused my data analysis on explicitly proving the validity of the term "conflicted communication," still it is important to remember that it emerged both from my observations and from the transcribed data and therefore can lay claim to a certain degree of validity.

Whence Conflict? Or, **Where** Did **That** Come From?

Remarks made by Felstiner two decades ago still hold true today in both the fields of conflict studies and communication.

> We do not know how dispute processing is affected by group cohesion, ethnic differences, economic or educational levels, stages in the life cycle or ideology. . . . If we want to get somewhere in responding effectively to disputes, it is

> critically important that we begin by finding out where we are. (1975, p. 704-705)

Within the course of this study it became clear that an understanding of the motivating forces of conflict (never mind what the teleological roots of conflict might be) could not be lifted from an adult-centered (and de-contextualized) framework (Jones & Brinkman, 1993; Farley-Lucas, Hale & Tardy, 1993; Hartup, et al., 1988; Maynard, 1985a). To locate the inspiration of youth conflicted communication in a commonly-accepted definition of the genesis of conflict--for example, conflict emerges out of the competition for scarce resources, incompatible goals or perceived interference from another party in accomplishing a goal--would be both inadequate and potentially misleading (Hocker & Wilmot, 1991, p. 12).

Some researchers identify other motivations within adolescent conflict which reside outside of such explanations as those mentioned above. For example, children may use conflict as a means of exploring the structural resources of their language (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1987, p. 226) or they may use conflict as a way of working and re-working "a social organization in which some specific status hierarchy will be a definitive feature" (Maynard, 1985a, p. 213). But while such attributions emerge from grounded studies of youth conflict, they too often betray the disciplinary orientation of the researcher and thus implicitly reveal the limitations of the research.

While Maynard's and Goodwin and Goodwin's explanations come closer than adult-centered explanations to revealing something of the complexity of adolescent conflicted communication,[4] they do not adequately address the powerful forces of both micro-level and macro-level contextualization and socialization[5] on conflict texts. And it is this very complexity which makes the study of adolescent conflicted communication so intriguing. Unfortunately, according to Goodwin and Goodwin (1987, p. 232), the social sciences have a tradition of de-complexifying social phenomena and have treated

> . . . language, culture and social organization as essentially different types of phenomena, and indeed frequently . . . relegate them to entirely different disciplines. . . . Thus Radcliffe-Brown (1973, p. 310) was of the opinion that whereas there may be "certain indirect interactions between social structure and language . . . these would seem to be of minor importance."

The tendency to separate inextricably linked phenomena as well as the emphasis in most studies of children's conflict on identifying how conflicts can be resolved expediently (Eisenberg & Garvey, 1981) and harmony restored rather than on exploring the actual forms of and forces behind conflicted communication for their own sake (Maynard, 1985a; Hartup & DeWit, 1978, p. 138) still continues. These preoccupations have thus resulted in a gap in literature which examines: the ways the various phenomena of language, culture and social organization co-create ways of being and doing within conflicted communication and; how a particular dispute operates in the

overall associational process of involved parties (Maynard, 1985a, p. 220).

So, once again, in trying to fix upon a viable motivational base for youth conflicted communication, I bumped into the same problem I encountered when trying to determine the characteristics of that same phenomenon. Within the available literature multiple definitions of conflict precipitators abide, lodged firmly in their particular constructions of individual psychology or biology, sociology or economics.

Lederach offers the most socially viable and delimiting explanation of "whence conflict". He writes that conflicts emerge out of:

> . . . those unique episodes (acts/events) when we explicitly recognize the existence of multiple realities and negotiate the creation of a common meaning.[6] (1988, p. 39)

Despite the merits of this explanation, it still needs to be tweaked a bit to suit my research context. Within adolescent conflict there is perhaps not so much construction of common meanings, which implies agreement and even, perish the thought, resolution, as there is ongoing negotiation and constant re-creation of multiple individual and group realities. These negotiations and re-creations are shaped by and, in turn, shape context. Therefore, the motivating force behind youth conflicted communication at Walnut School appears to be the desire to maintain social fluidity, that constant shifting of the

social status of individuals and groups using the valued socio-cultural content associated with adolescence and the broader family, ethnic and environmental realms to do so.

A Theoretical Process Schema for Conflicted Communication

One of the goals of this ethnographic study is to display some of the structural[7] schematics as well as thematic patterns in the data. Relatively little theory-making on a structural level exists in conflict studies, with the exceptions perhaps of the elaborate statistical derivations of game theory or the isolation of speech acts/events in discourse analysis. Even less theorizing has come out of naturalistic empirical studies.

I use the word "structural" very loosely and do not mean to imply universalism or the absence of divergence from a hard-wired, genetically-embedded deep structure. The generic schemata which I present are an attempt to reveal some of the interactional progressions or procedures that reveal themselves in adolescent conflict behavior, keeping in mind Rosaldo's critique of the limitations of traditional structural speech act theory, and applying it to my analysis. Her words hold equally true for my attempt at addressing structural technicalities of conflict.

> . . . speech act theorists have failed to grapple with some of the more exciting implications of their work. They think of "doing things with words" as the achievement of autonomous selves, whose deeds are not significantly constrained by the relationships and expectations that define their local world. In the end, I claim, the theory fails because it does not comprehend the

> sociality of individuals who use its 'rules' and 'resources' to act. Stated otherwise, it fails because it construes action independent of its reflexive status both as consequence and cause of human social forms. (1990, p. 374)

It is precisely the relationships and expectations that define a local world--their sociality--that make the patterns of youth conflict what they are. In laying out some of the patterned progressions of conflicted communication among a diverse group of adolescents, one must use both "the social and [the] psychological world in which the language user operates at any given time" (Ochs, 1979, p. 1).

Both of these worlds, but especially the social world, comprise my points of departure and the content I attempt to explicate. Without empirical grounding, a working schema which consists of a conceptual framework and a generic model of conflict process may have no relevance to practice. As was mentioned earlier, a number of conflict analysts point out the absence of and the need for grounded, naturalistic, descriptive studies of conflict.

The structural model I present is constructed at the "macro" level and is influenced by some of the components identified by Hymes (1974, p. 63), especially message form, message content, key, norms of interaction and norms of interpretation, rather than at the detailed, fine-grained "micro" level of the texture of discourse itself.[8]

Despite Hymes' declaration of the need for both macro and micro level analyses, I must emphasize that this study

was not specifically designed to be a detailed Hymesian sociolinguistic analysis of the conflicted communication phenomenon among this group of adolescents even though some elements of his analytical framework may be present.

While my theoretical framework and analysis have been influenced by Hymes, I find that the recent integrative work of Goodwin and Duranti best suits the type of macro-level focus of this current study. They re-introduce the concept of context, not as a frame that surrounds talk but rather as a "socially constituted, interactively sustained, time-bound phenomenon" (1992, p.6).

The dimensions of context include (and I quote at length from Goodwin and Duranti in order to clearly and succinctly present their framework):

> **setting**, the social and spatial framework within which encounters are situated. . . . neither the physical nor the social setting for talk is something that is fixed, immutable and simply 'out there.' Instead, these phenomena, and the very real constraints they provide, are dynamically and socially constituted by activities (talk included) of the participants which stand in a reflexive relationship to the context thus constituted;
>
> **behavioral environment**, the way that participants use their bodies and behavior as a resource for framing and organizing their talk. Through spatial orientation and posture, participants both display their continuing access to the actions of others present and frame the talk they are producing. Of particular importance is the way in which postural framing establishes the preconditions for coordinated social action by enabling participants to both project and negotiate what is about to happen. . . . Rather than constituting a separate 'nonverbal' level of organization, the context provided by the behavioral environment of talk is intricately and

reflexively linked to it within larger patterns of social activity;

language as context has to do with the manners in which talk itself constitutes a main resource for the organization of context;

extrasituational context is concerned with how the appropriate understanding of a conversational exchange requires background knowledge that extends far beyond the local talk and immediate setting. (1992, pp. 6-8)

Although this more dynamic, mutually reflexive relationship between talk and context is being explored in a number of different fields, it has not yet permeated the perspectives presented in most works on interpersonal (and other subfields of) conflict studies.

A Framework for the Structural Base of Adolescent Conflict: Situations, Events, Acts, and Triggers

A macro-level structural framework for conflicted communication is presented in Figure 4. Each of the components will be discussed in the following sections.

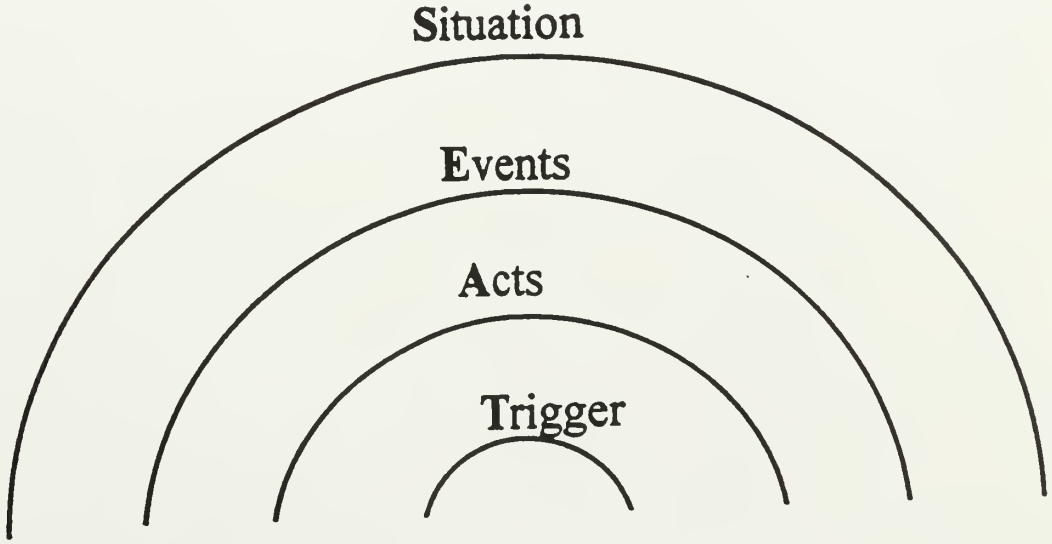

Figure 4. Macro-Level Structural Framework for Conflicted Communication

When this schema is combined with Figure 3 presented previously, the resulting visual Figure 5.

Endlessly creative variations can be derived from this model, since there are multiple combinations and re-combinations of participants and multiple combinations and re-combinations of triggers, acts and events. It is in this multiplicity that dynamic force of adolescent conflict

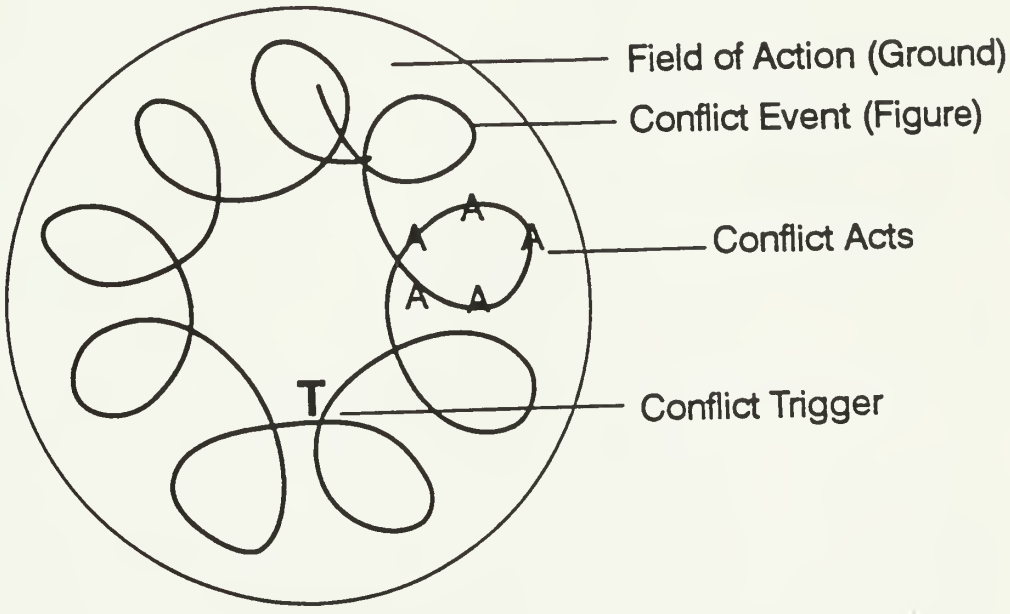

Figure 5. Structured Dynamism: The Elements of a Conflict Situation

resides. As children grow older and leave the public schools, their pool of potential co-disputants may narrow and, consequently, the 50,000 multiple creative variations of participant combinations and re-combinations. The workplace or the home place may have different

institutional and environmental norms or discourses[9] than those produced in middle school or high school.

The Conflict Situation

Figure 5 is an attempt to represent the elements of a conflict situation. While I am indebted to Hymes and borrow much of his terminology, I have altered his schematic definitions of situation, event and act both practically and conceptually in order to construct a theory of conflicted communication. Within my schema, I define the conflict situation as a superordinate domain which can encompass any number of events. These events may manifest sporadically over the course of years or intense action may occur over the course of hours or weeks and then go quiet; consequently, it may appear that a particular conflict situation has an ending.

But the idea of ending is accurate only in the sense that there may be a redefinition of the relationship by the disputants. If the disputants begin to call each other by a variety of terms such as friend, girl, boy, 'sociate, hi-bye friends, part of my posse, they have re-defined the relationship and, for the time being, the conflict situation is in a quiescent stage.

However, the conflict situation has not actually terminated. The prior active events become part of the historical memory and thus can be re-activated at any given time, serving as a rationale, a justification and an

additional goad for any actions being considered in the present. For example, participants frequently mention conflicts events which occurred months or years previous. When a trigger is directed toward him/her in present time by a disputant, those past events take on significance once again. Thus a conflict situation consists of active and quiet phases, is not bound by time or place, and has historical dimensions. It is comprised of conflict acts and events.

The Conflict Event and Act

The particular individual loops in Figure 5 represent specific conflict events. Borrowing Hymesian language, these events[10] are defined as being

> restricted to activities or aspects of activities, that are governed by rules or norms for the use of speech [or nonvocal displays]. An event may consist of a single speech [or nonvocal] act, but will often comprise several. . . . A [conflict] act is the minimal term of the speech [conflict] event. It encompasses the speakers' [disputants'] shared knowledge that is both immediate and abstract and has to do with features of interaction and context . . . (1974, pp. 52-53)

This characteristic of being minimal is shared by conflict events and acts. Just as an act is the minimal term of any event, so is an event its' own minimal term of the conflict situation. But whereas Hymes (1974, p. 52) states that a speech act may be the whole of a speech event, and of a speech situation, [say, a rite consisting of a single prayer, itself a single invocation], this is

not the case with adolescent conflict acts, events and situations--unless one is writing about intrapersonal conflict in which case calling oneself a bitch does not necessarily demand a counter response by that same self.

In adolescent conflict, uttering a word guarantees a response. And it is equally rare that an act is not tied to an event and the event is not similarly tied to the situation. This theory is based on analysis of the sequential processes of multiple conflict events. In short, the everyday conflict acts and events are always part of a larger social situation and are always mediated by context.

For example, while speech events may consist of one speech act, it is rarely the case that a conflict event will consist of only one conflict act. And while there may be and often is a time lag between one act and another, when the acts are examined longitudinally, one can see how they comprise a conflict event. Just as acts can extend across time, so too can events, thus comprising a situation. A generic scope and sequence model of a youth conflict act is presented in Figure 6.

Schegloff (1992) has investigated this phenomenon in his work on conversation analysis. He explores "how events which seem to disattend their local context when examined on the micro level, can in fact be found to be organized by their placement in much larger sequences" (Goodwin &

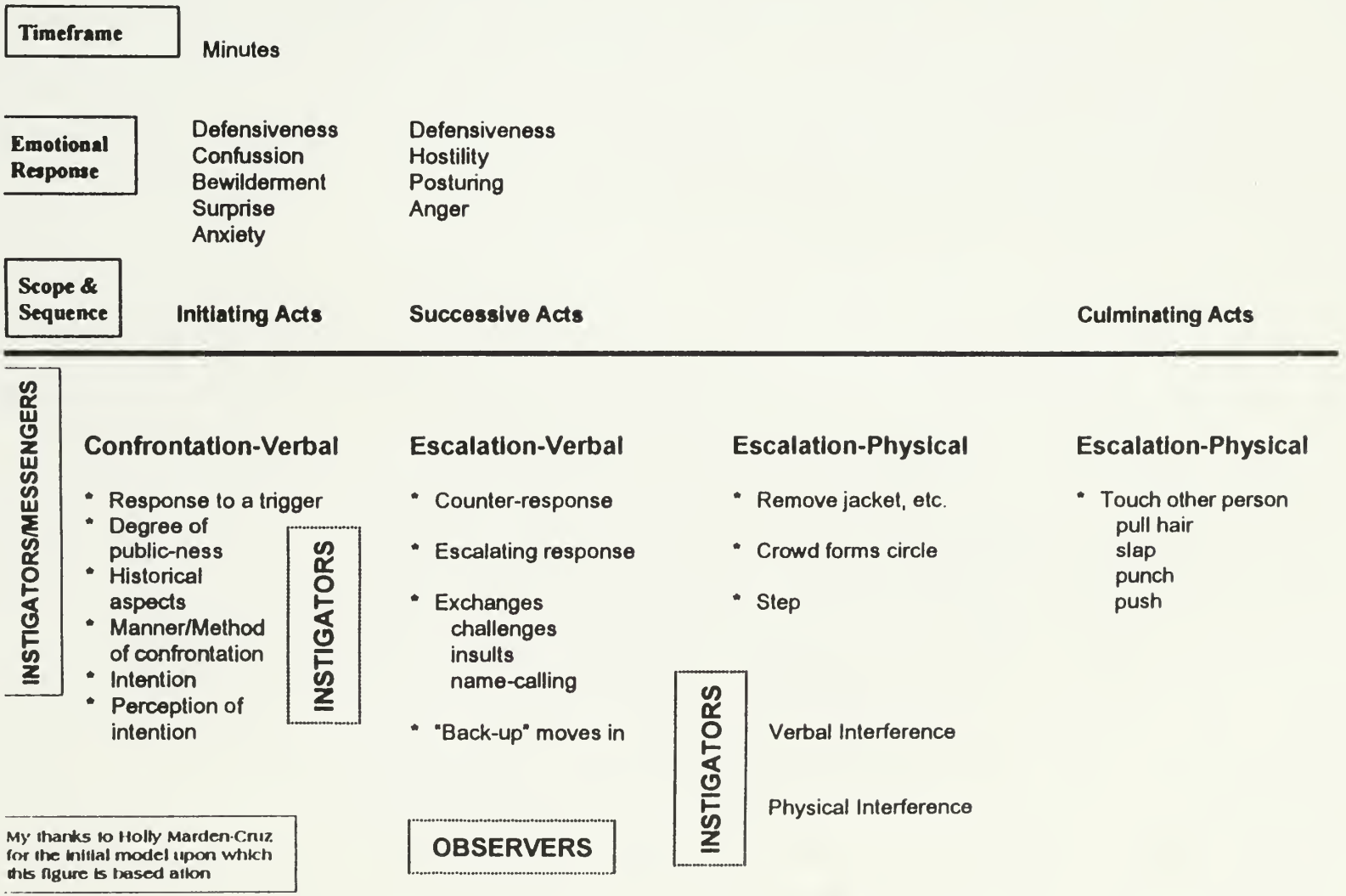

Figure 6. Generic Model of Conflict Acts - Scope & Sequence

Duranti, 1992, p. 30). Generally, students come to a mediation session and identify the most immediate event/act or trigger that has occurred. But with a great deal of back-pedalling, one can locate those most immediate behaviors within the larger conflict situation, identifying other triggers/acts/events and identifying the contextual precedents.

Consider the example given by George and Felix, two 6th grade Puerto Rican boys. George identifies aspects of the most recent contextual setting. He and Felix were chilling (relaxing); they were outside among other students; George did not want to fight Bill-Bill. George then identifies the immediate trigger--Bill-Bill comes rolling up and grabs George. Bill-Bill has used his body and behavior to establish the preconditions for coordinated social action (Goodwin & Duranti, 1992, p. 6).

But Bill-Bill's action appears to be completely disattentive to the immediate local setting. Felix, however, addresses the extrasituational context and supplies more information which thus locates Bill-Bill's trigger action in the larger conflict sequence and historical context. His action begins to make sense. The following recounting by George and Felix fleshes out the conflicted communication situation.

> George: We, we chilling and this kid from our bus, Bill-Bill, he comes rolling up on us. He grabbed me by my neck, man. I didn't want to have to fight, see, because--if he wants me to, we could go at it. I don't care.

Felix: And then upstairs, he (Bill-Bill) was talking to me. No, it was his friend (Tom-Tom, who is Bill-Bill's friend). He said, "Yeah, that's when my boy, William (Bill-Bill), gonna beat you up." And I was like, "Yo, man. NObody beat me up. Not even you." He said, "Oh yeah? ?? do this." And I went like, "What's up?" And I took off my shades and my hat and this, I just had my T-shirt on. And I went around. Walk. Walk, walk, walk. And he be like, "STEP!" So I stepped. He didn't do nothing. He was punked up.

Valerie: Why do you think he (Bill-Bill) wanted to fight?

George: He think he bad.

Felix: To defend his friend (Tom-Tom).

Valerie: What had gone on with his friend?

Felix: All right. Because his friend (Tom-Tom) was picking on me and his friend. And I went, "Back UP, man. Move back." And he was like, "Don't be touching me." I went like, "BACK UP!" So I pushed him. He said, "Don't be touching me." So I said, "MOVE, MAN. FINE. MOVE." He wouldn't move. He said, "All my boys are here." So he pointed to George. And George said, "No, man, I ain't your boy. That's my boy (Felix)." And he pointed to my friend, J.B. And J.B. said, "I'm not your boy, that's my boy (Felix)." (Tape 36, lines 4-38)

Bill-Bill, in attempting to demonstrate his status, actually lost face twice in two separate conflict acts. The conflict event remains open, as demonstrated by George's description of Bill-Bill's most recent trigger behavior in which he tries to regain his status.

The following story told by Leticia, an eleventh grade Puerto Rican woman, illustrates the importance of an understanding of the phenomenon of extrasituational context

as well. However, Leticia presents her story in a more linear fashion than George and Felix.

> Well, it was a conflict between my sister and her, really, because of their boyfriends. And I kind of got involved in it cause I'm always nosey. I got involved in it and something happened . . . Me and the girl started arguing for days and days and days. And then, one day, I think it was wintertime, me and her just started exchanging words and stuff. I was going to check the mailbox in the back. And when I was walking back there, she was like, "You Bitch," and everything. (Tape 27, p. 1)

In the majority of conflicted communication situations in which the participants in this study are involved, it is the immediate trigger or act of the moment that is initially spoken about when disputants retell their stories. Sometimes information which has to do with the immediate context is presented if a student feels it is relevant, especially if he/she has been coerced into performing a certain conflict text involuntarily.

But generally, the act or trigger seems to come from out of nowhere until one works to lay out other acts/events in the sequence as well to identify immediate and extrasituational contextual data. The situation described previously by George and Felix illustrates this need to go deeper to understand the social order in place at a given moment and thus to understand the isolated act/event as part of a broader conflicted interaction.

One must also reconsider the assumption that speech events are bounded in terms of time and place. In conflicted communication, events/acts or triggers are not.

They are located within particular conflict situations which are unbounded and continuous. For example, a trigger can be directed toward a person, but that person may not be able to react immediately, this completing the response cycle in order to create a conflict act. This does not mean that there will be no response at some later point in time in some other place. It is almost a certainty that a response will occur. The only unknown is the place and the time.

Jamie, an African-American 8th grader, illustrates both of these points--that conflicted communication acts and events do not actually end and that acts and events are not bounded by time and place, but are carried in the historical memory--in his description of one conflict situation in which he was involved.

> This kid in school, he swear he's in the La Familia gang and he was talking so much junk to me, one day that I just told him to either step up or shut up at Mr. Fairman's room. And then, he came up to me, and I was sitting down and he walked up behind me and put me in a headlock. I turned around, I mean, I stood up and I threw him off my back and he went flying into Mr. Fairman's window and broke the window open. And then I ran away from the window and turned around and punched him in the face. And he was all cut up, right? And I didn't have one scratch on me. And then Mr. Fairman came in. And I was like, "He been messing with me all year. You know that." I didn't get in no trouble. (Tape 27, p. 10)

The Trigger

In Hymes' schema, the smallest element is the speech act. Within conflicted communication, a smaller element

must be introduced--the conflict trigger. Conflict triggers are verbal and non-verbal displays that one person uses to signal the fact that a conflict is becoming active and overt. Triggers are also used to provoke a reaction. When a response is made, this response, together with the trigger accomplish an act. For example, a girl can roll her eyes ad infinitum. But until a second girl receives the eye rolling message and responds in some identifiable manner, there is no conflict act and the trigger means nothing on a social interactional level. Within Hymes' scheme, a verbal act has meaning regardless of the presence or absence of an audience.

The fluid shifting quality of adolescent conflicted communication mentioned previously is accomplished at the most mundane level by invoking key triggers. I use the term "trigger" rather than "cause" since that terminology is more suggestive of the conflict as punctuation/ interruption school of thought where it is believed that there is a concrete beginning and end to a conflict episode. In this study, most conflicts had no identifiable beginning causal display and any trigger could tip the interactional balance toward active engagement. As with most adult conflicts (Moore, 1986, p. 26), adolescent conflicts also often have multiple triggers. This is the case with many of the conflict cases analyzed in the present study.

I have borrowed Moore's (1986, p. 27) pie chart and added two additional categories (marked by asterisks--see Figure 7) in order to present the thirty-three triggers identified by study participants and appended by data from my observational field notes. The historical category could subsume all of the other triggers because at any given time a particular trigger might take on historical significance within a situation. However, I have limited the historical category so that it contains only grievances which have to do with family members or friends being involved in situations with the other disputant's family members or friends.

A Generic Model of a Conflict Event

Within adolescent conflict, a generic model of the conflict event can be constructed. While no two conflict events are exactly alike in all dimensions, most are predictable in terms of the sequence illustrated in Figure 8.

Maria and Magdalena

One actual event cycle involves tow young women, Maria and Magdalena, and their respective friendship groups. The participants are clustered according to their primary friendship groups. These friendship clusters and intergroup disputes are illustrated in Figure 9. Their event cycle is characterized by the following elements:

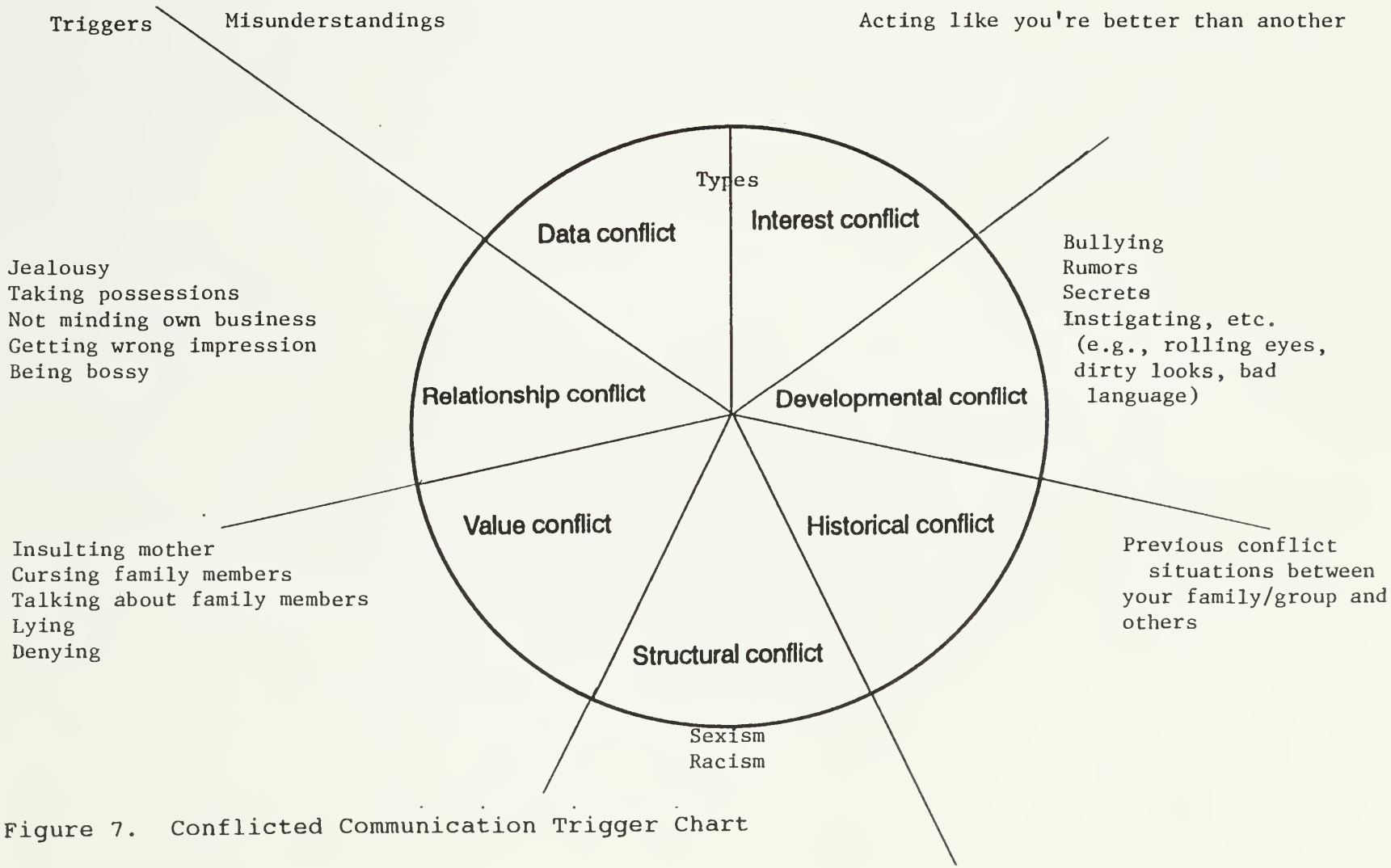

Figure 7. Conflicted Communication Trigger Chart

Antecedents (historical events, acts, triggers), current triggers, intentions, and interpretations.

The historical antecedents include:

* A fight last year between Maria and Magdalena.
* Bad feelings from last year which carry into the present between Maria and Rebecca.

The recent antecedents include:

* Bad feelings toward Virgilia held by Maria and Helen over the past two months because Virgilia's sister, Michelle, keeps telling Maria's group how "bad" Virgilia is.

The initiating triggers are:

* Michelle saying to Maria that Virgilia said Maria should give the coat back.
* Rebecca approaching Maria and saying that Virgilia said Maria should give back Michelle's coat.

The intention is to:

* Mention Michelle's back up in the form of Virgilia, implying that back up is there if needed to get the coat back.
* Demonstrate Michelle's back up in the form of Rebecca.
* Make a public display of the fact that Maria has not returned the coat yet.

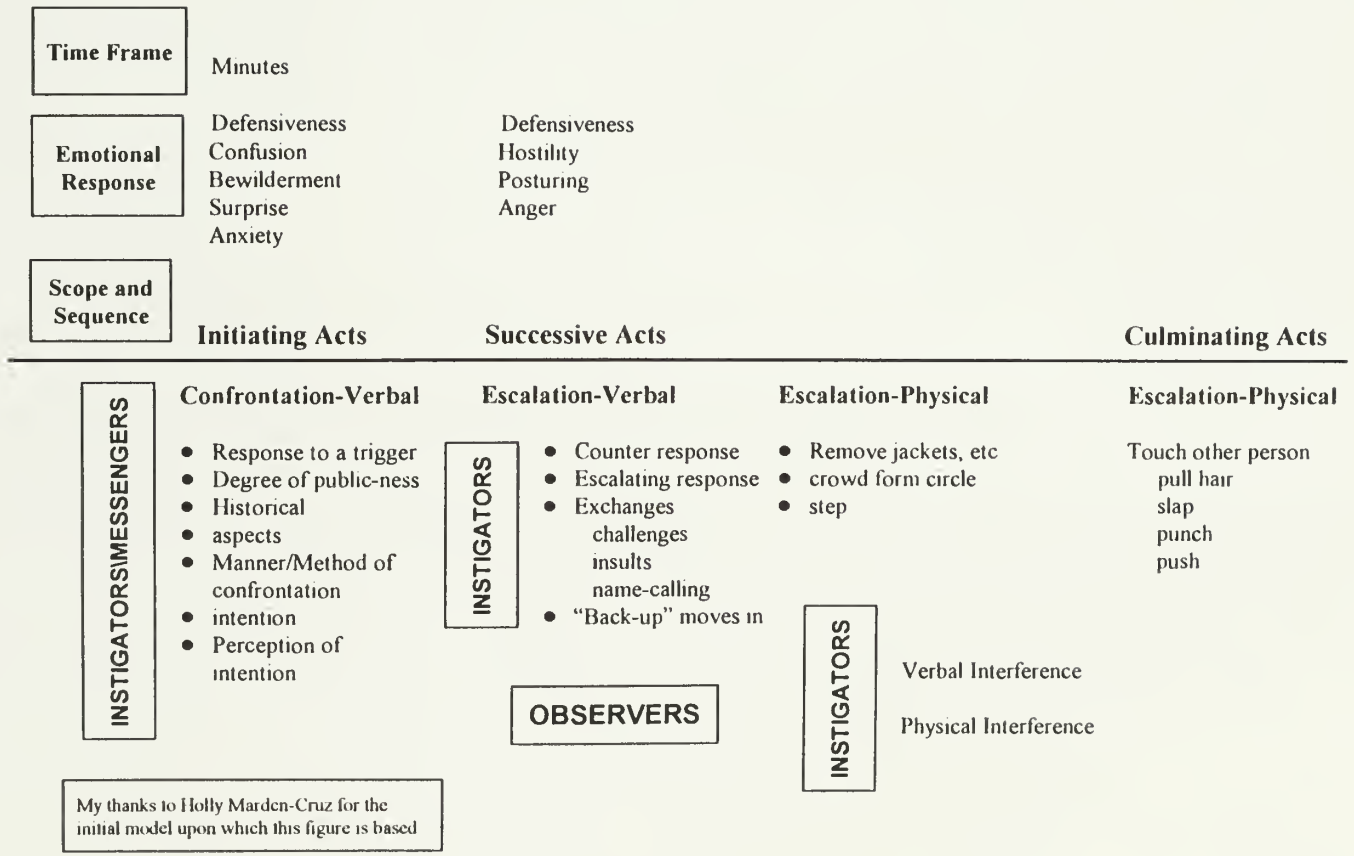

Figure 8. Generic Model of a Conflict Event--Scope and Sequence

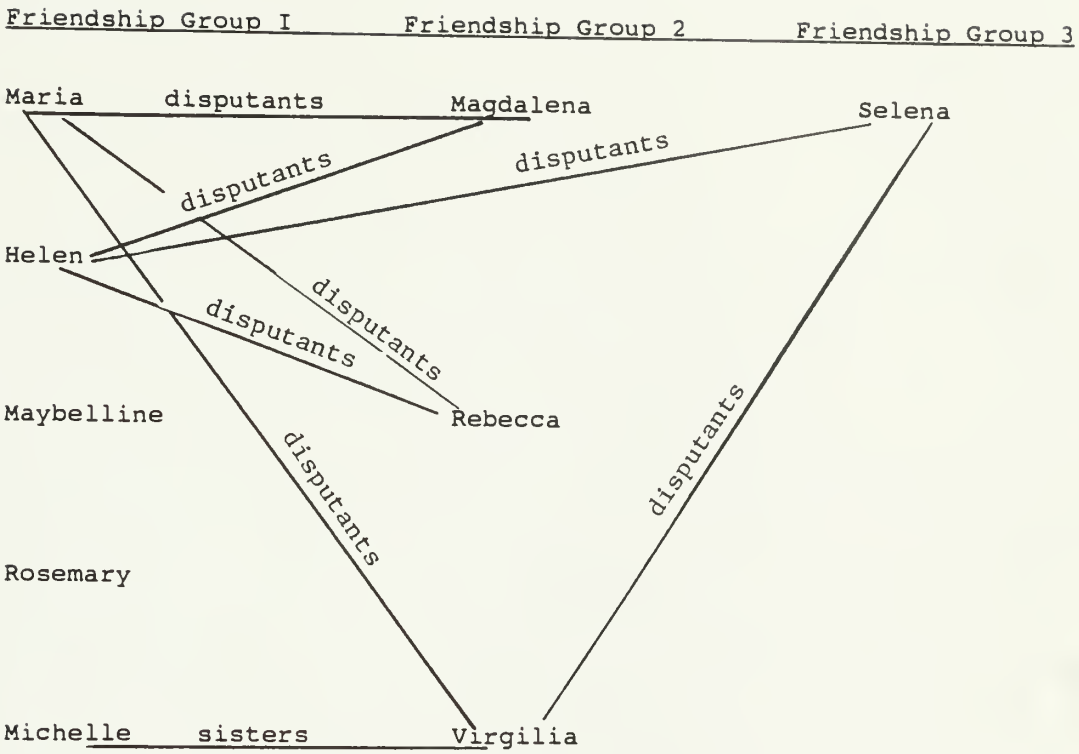

Figure 9. Friendship/Dispute Relationships

The interpretation of the intention is that:

* Maria believes that Virgilia is mentioned and that Rebecca is the one asking in order to intimidate her.
* Maria believes that it is being implied that she is a thief.

A series of interactions involving a number of participants then transpires, all of which contribute to the escalation of the situation. A significant piece of the transcript of this particular situation is presented verbatim, then selected parts of the situation are presented using the Conflict Event Generic Model (Figure

10) in order to demonstrate in a linear way how conflicted communication develops.

MARIA: She (Missy) goes back and forth. She be telling her sister we're calling her names. She brings back and forth. She's like the ??. She bring her nose over there and then she bring over here. She's between both of the problems. She goes over here and then there. She hears. We talk about her sister and then she tell her sister. She tell her sister that she was going to beat me up. I don't even care. I ain't got nothing to say. But she's the kind of girl bringing it back and forth. One time, I was like she came to me, she said that her sister said to tell me that she was going to beat me up. SO I was like, "Well, what is the point all about?" Then we went outside--that's how--all started like this--we all three went outside. We went to her sister. We asked her, "Who's the one who's going to hit her cause nobody's talking about you. Your sister the one who's bringing back and forth." And then her sister come out and said, "Well, my sister said that you wanted to fight me." See? That's the point. She bringing back and forth. And we say something and she goes and tell her sister something. And her sister says something and she goes and tell us. And that's why this problem come, like that. That's what we all--like rest of the ?? she was going to fight us--all three. And this one start arguing her. And she couldn't explain cause--I don't know why.

MAYBEL: When we walk, she be calling us name and we don't like that.

MARIA: Her sister (Michelle) is saying that she (Virgilia) wanted to fight Selena. She gets along with Selena and everything and she went to Selena and told her that her sister wanted to fight her. So Selena came to her and they got started a little argument there. I was not even around. I was with her back there and they were over here. I know when Selena came down she was like, "I'm going to fight her. I'm going to do this, I'm going to do that." That's what I

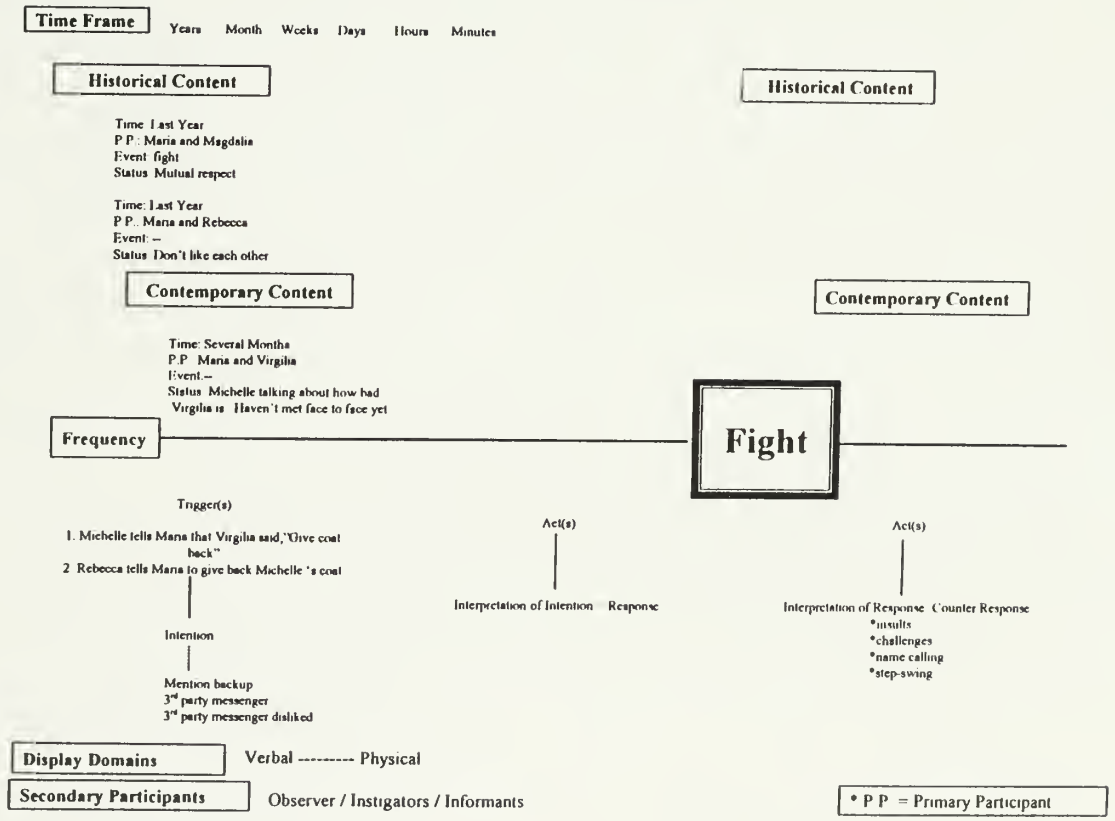

Figure 10. Maria and Michelle's Conflict Applied to Generic Model of Conflict Events--Scope and Sequence

hear. When we went to her sister, her sister told us that she wanted to fight Selena. Then when we went out to the 7th grade recess, she went to Selena and told Selena that **her** sister wanted to fight **her**. Then Selena went to her then they started a little argument. That was yesterday.

MEDIATOR: When do you remember all this began?

MARIA: All this began cause I had a coat from her and I was using it, right, and then her sister asked me and I told her I was going to give it to her so she saw me with her coat on and ?? Rebecca came and said, "This is ?? the coat." So I told, "You could--." I just went just like that, "You could shove it!" That's it. And I didn't give the coat then. The girl just started talking and talking, all that crack. So I just keep on walking. Then **this** little girl (Virgilia) started talking, "If one of you all hit my **sister**! Oh, it's--we're going to fight. We're going to do this." All started because a coat! You know what I'm trying to say? And from that--

MEDIATOR: But you had borrowed a coat from [Michelle]?

MARIA: Yeah. We were all ready until [Michelle] sister booked into this school and she started like--she think she's all bad and everything--Her sister thinks she's all bad. [Michelle] always saying, "Oh, my sister could do this. My sister could fight. My sister could--." So we got into it--we was like, "Your sister could fight, why doesn't she get between one of us?" She went to her sister and said that we wanted to fight her. Then her sister (Michelle) came and told her (Virgilia) that she wanted to--that I said that I wanted to fight her. I didn't never say that I wanted to fight her. I said, "She hits me, I'm going to hit her back." Cause that's what I got hands for. And then this one--

MEDIATOR: Good for other things, too.

MARIA: (laughs) I know that. But she throwing ??, I have to throw back. Cause this one (Michelle)--she won't hear what we saying. She could be next to us and she won't say nothing. But her ears are real open if you

say her sister name! And she goes, "I hear them say this and this and this." And then whatever her sister say, she come and tells us. You know what I'm say--so, she's the ??? We're not even saying nothing bad about her sister--we're saying--"Well, Michelle's always saying that her sister's baaaad. Does she think she could beat up everybody? I hope she ain't talking **about** me." That's all I say. And then she goes and tell her **sister!**

MEDIATOR: So where did all this begin?

MARIA: Yeah, but I was using her coat cause she was using my sweater. And it was for a night. And then she left the sweater at home and it was real cold outside and I'm not going to get sick just because I'm going to give her the coat cause I ?? but it was vacation. So I said we'll just go on vacation. And then when I came, for no reason, she said, "My sister said-" in a rude way--"My sister said you better give me the coat back." I was going to give her the coat back. **Her** sister didn't have to say. She got a mouth to say it to **me**. And I just got mad at that because her sister shouldn't even be in the business. OOOH. Hate that sister. Hate her.

MEDIATOR: So it sounds like to me that you want//

MARIA: //Yeah. Instead of her sister coming to me and **her** friends. She's got to stop bringing things to her sister and her sister bringing things to us. Cause I don't want to hear it no more--that her sister says this and that--

MARIA: (says what she wants of Michelle in Spanish then in English) You keep not coming, I keep not coming. I can't say it in Spanish.

SELENA: ??

MARIA: Helen wants everybody in the table-

SELENA: I want everyone in the table talk face and face.

MARIA: WHOA-HO-HO! That's cool, man. Like if you talk face to face and whoever's is lying, you'd be like, "TSK! Man, you lying. SAY THE TRUTH! SAY THE TRUTH!"

MEDIATOR: How are you involved in this Maybelline?

MAYBEL: Because when we walk, she (Virgilia) be calling us name.

MEDIATOR: She comes up to you?

MAYBEL: No. She be calling out.

MARIA: Like we in the bus--me and her (Maybelline). We take the same bus and then the walkers, they come out before the bus leave so she's like, "OH! Look at all the girls!", pointing on us like--UNH!

MEDIATOR: It sounds like you really don't like her sister.

MARIA: I just can't--I just--Cause her sister, with her friends, so when we get in the bus, she started pointing on us, right? So the door is closed. She's lucky that we **inSIDE** the bus cause if we were out**side**, she would not **do** that. Cause she points at me, I'd be like--I hope you're not pointing at **me**! Cause I going . . . ?? One of these days she's just going to get so much on my nerves, I'm just going to hit her (little laugh).

MEDIATOR: If her sister wasn't coming to you and saying things, you don't have a problem, right?

MARIA: We'd be happy, like--we don't have to worry about her.

MEDIATOR: Do you get along with her?

MARIA: Yeah. We get along with her. It's just her sister. Like we want her--if we say something, we're not talking bad about her sister. We're saying she should go to her sister, "Don't act bad in Walnut." Cause she's not--Some girls--won't be us--but some girls, if you act bad--they're ain't--they're not like us--they're going to **jump** her! So I'm telling her to tell her to tell her sister, "Don't act bad in Walnut! Don't

talk back--because if you talk back to a girl--"//

SELENA: //Magdalena and her sister...

MARIA: Magdalena's the kind of girl that she...like Magdalena and her sister--they're like--Magdalena's the kind of girl that she told her like, "Oh, you ain't going to hit her." Like we were eat lunch--we're going to go eat. Then Magdalena came out, "Who's calling me the B word?" She thought it was Selena. And Selena went, "**I** didn't call you that. Cause if I was going to say, I would have told you. Cause I don't got no reason to told you that." They started arguing--Maybelline and her sister. Then Magdalena say, "Whoever hit her, I'm going to get in." You know, just that Magdalena--and I just told her, "Well, I'm out of here." I want to tell her that you ain't gonna do **nothin**. Just because you fought a girl in 8th grade, you think you all bad, just because you fought a girl that you wanted to fight **so bad**. Cause if you fight one of us, I'm going to hit her back cause I fought with Magdalena last year, so I don't even care. Even if she's big--her sister can get in. Her sister's always getting in, like, "You hit my sister, I'm going to hit you back." I'm like, "You hit me back, I'm going"//

MEDIATOR: //Who's her sister?

MARIA: //And then Magdalena was the one who brought them to **downstairs** cause they don't know the room.

MEDIATOR: So maybe if Virgilia understands that//you don't got a problem//

MARIA: //that we don't got a problem with each other//

MEDIATOR: //that she'll back off.

MARIA: She won't back off. She got one of those friends, they, she got two friends, they don't get along with us. So she could back up but Magdalena **and** Rebecca they would tell her, "Well, I don't know what you did that. You should have fight them." Cause that's what Magdalena, "Oh, go beat her up."

(makes UNHHH sound of exasperation and disgust) Oh. I just can't wait til Magdalena told me that cause I'm going to just tell her something, "Magdalena think you all bad just because you fuck. Hah, hah. **Big deal**."

MEDIATOR: If Virgilia were here, what would you like to talk about?

HELEN: Like to stop calling us name when we walk.

MARIA: I remember the day **we** were walking, Rebecca came up, "Oh, you act so bad." So you were like// (to Selena) She asked me, "You wanted to fight her?" Because we were walking, right, down that way and then Rebecca was walking toward and then she asked me, "Oh, you wanted to fight Missy?" So I was like, "Not me. I wasn't going to fight her." And then **she** (Virgilia) came out and said, "Even if she was going to fight her, what's the big thing about it?" And then Rebecca came out and said, "Oh! You think you're all bad." Then she started saying bad words and **she** started saying bad words, too, back. And I thought--?? keep on walking, I just keep on walking. And the most word that I **hate** is the **B** word. AAAGH. I just can't ??. You want to call people that? Call yourself. Cause it takes one to know another one ??. That's what **I** say. (Tape 15, lines 20 - 339)

Maria and Michelle's situation also yields some good examples of what Heritage (1984, p. 242) calls the doubly contextual characteristic of vocal and nonvocal displays. These displays both "establish the preconditions for coordinated social action" at a given moment and "project and negotiate what is about to happen". Put a bit differently, "a subsequent utterance not only relies upon existing context for its production and interpretation, but that utterance is in its own right an event that shapes a

new context for the action that will follow it" (Goodwin & Duranti, 1992, p. 7).

Participants can invoke alternative contextual frames within the vocal and nonvocal displays of the moment (Gumperz, 1982a, cited in Goodwin & Duranti, 1992, p. 5). Consequently, these displays have multiple intention functions. The mediation between these intentions and the interpretations of the intentions by the disputants both grounds the present moment and shapes the future moment.

Take, for example, the series of vocal exchanges between Maria and Magdalena. (Note especially the bold segments.)

MARIA: //How do you know all this? You don't even know the girl that much. She just came new. How do you know all this crap?

MAGDA: Because, man, she tells me everything.

MARIA: She doesn't even know the girl//

MAGDA: //I know her

Mediator: OK. I'm going to throw it out here. What do you guys want to do?

MARIA: People that don't supposed to be here, get out.

MAGDA: Are you trying to tell me to get out? Why should I get out? Cause you're telling me to get out?//

MARIA: Yeah. You don't belong here. You don't belong here.

MAGDA: Yes, I do. Don't be getting smart//

MARIA: //I get smart whenever I want to. It's my mouth. You can't do nothing about it//

MAGDA: Yes, I can. Don't start with me, Maria.

MARIA: I'll start anything I want. It's my mouth.

MAGDA: Don't start with me, Maria.

MARIA: You don't start with me and I don't start with you//

MAGDA: **You** don't start with me, all right? If she tells me to don't be here, I won't be here. You don't have to be telling me to don't be here.

MEDIATOR: Magdalena, Magdalena.

(Silence for 3 seconds)

MAGDA: (sotto voce) Think you're real bad.

MARIA: Like you think you're bad.

MAGDA: I don't think I'm bad, Maria.

MARIA: Well, why they went downstairs for? Looking for a fight?

Throughout these 40 lines, each young woman both responds to the immediate previous utterance and projects into the future. The range of functions contained within these responses and projections is extensive; and any one utterance might embody several functions, for example, threatening, warning, posturing, inquiring, responding, defending, escalating. A good deal of what transpires in an act/event is dependent upon the intended functions and the interpretation of those intentions. The interpretation then leads to a response which incorporates its own intention functions.

For instance, Maria says:

"People that don't supposed to be here, get out."

Using this indirect command, Maria both diminishes Magdalena's role in the conflict situation and projects and

negotiates about what she wants to have happen. But Magdalena interprets Maria's utterance as a challenge to her status. She responds to Maria's attempt to diminish her role by challenging Maria's authority over her. She directly confronts Maria and utters her own challenge, saying: "Are you trying to tell me to get out? Why should I get out? Cause you're telling me to get out?"

At this point, Maria draws on contextual data from the past, that Magdalena really has not been involved directly in this conflict as a primary participant. Maria again both responds to Magdalena's challenging question and tries to move her out of the mediation. Maria says: "Yeah. You don't belong here. You don't belong here."

Magdalena interprets Maria's response as a second challenge to her role and status in the present time mediation and refuting Maria's assertion follows with a command which is actually meant to serve as a warning: "Yes, I do. Don't be getting smart." At this point, Magdalena has successfully pulled Maria into the present context and has engaged her in the creation of a new conflict event. The two girls begin to move through a series of verbal conflict acts beginning with:

MARIA: //I get smart whenever I want to. It's my mouth. You can't do nothing about it//

MAGDA: Yes, I can. Don't start with me, Maria.

Without intervention from a third party (or even perhaps because other hearers were present), these acts of verbal

exchange could easily have escalated into a fight within a matter of minutes.

Curtis and Robert

A second situation involving two sixth graders, Curtis, an African-American boy, and Robert, a European-American boy, also demonstrates how both vocal and nonvocal displays can constitute multiple functions, thus both establishing the preconditions for coordinated social action and projecting and negotiating what is about to happen (Goodwin & Duranti, 1992, p. 6). They also describe how the involvement of other participants can rapidly invoke and create alternative contextual frames.

> Curtis: The first, a few days after school began, and then a whole bunch of people gathered around and he took off his coat like he was getting ready to fight. I took off my coat. We stood there for a few minutes.
>
> Robert: A couple of days after school started, I was walking out and he confronts me and says, "I heard that you're saying stuff about me." I said, "I wasn't." And, "My mother--" or something like that. Said, "I wasn't." And all these kids come around and I didn't want to fight. And I walk away. And second time, I was in art and he said, "I bet you I could beat up everybody." I said, "Ok, Curtis. Sure." And then he said something. Can't remember what he said. Maybe he wasn't in a good mood. He pushed me. So I take off my jacket and push him back. Mr. Zing comes up and brought us to Dr. Oliveros. (Tape 35, lines 1-22)

The alternation of frames occurs several times. Robert is leaving the school, unaware that Curtis wants anything from him until Curtis stops him with a statement,

"I heard that you're saying stuff about me--my mother." Locked within that statement is a contextual frame of which Robert, although he is unaware of his role, is a key figure.[11] A sequence from a previous contextual background is already in place and is making an impact on the present setting before Robert is even cognizant of it.

When Curtis confronts Robert, the statement serves multiple functions. The syntactic fact that it is a statement rather than a question is significant. Curtis could easily have said, "Have you been talking about me--my mother?" To which, depending on Curtis' non-verbal signals, a simple "No" could have been uttered. A statement, however, reveals less uncertainty about the truth of a supposed action allows the speaker to take a superior position and requires a more vociferous denial from the hearer.

Curtis uses his statement to demonstrate that he is willing to directly confront Robert about his supposed "talk". By doing this, he is projecting the fact that he is not afraid of what will happen in the future with Robert as a consequence of his verbal action. He is also leaving very little room for Robert to negotiate the construction of the future.

The manner in which the hearer responds to a trigger is especially important. Robert does not deny Curtis' accusation in a way that satisfies Curtis. Robert says, "I wasn't" and then walks away from the setting when other

students come around, creating yet another contextual frame. And again, by walking away, Robert creates an alternative contextual frame, different from Curtis' and the other participants', at least for the moment.

Curtis, however, because he is unsatisfied with the exchange, shifts the frame again in art class by making another vocal display which is directed to Robert. His verbal trigger is both a challenge and a statement of potential: "I bet I could beat up everybody." But Robert shifts the frame by his noncommittal response, "Ok, Curtis, sure." Curtis, still dissatisfied, then says something to shift the frame and brings in a nonvocal display to keep the context under his control. This works. Robert takes off his jacket and pushes back. Curtis has at last succeeded in establishing coordinated social action through a sequence of satisfactory parallel responses within a longer-lasting, momentarily stable context.

Concluding Comments

The manner in which acts and events merge with the local field of action both constitutes and creates the context. But this contextualization of the immediate moment has its own broader social placement and historical connections. It does not materialize out of nothingness. Cicourel (1980, p. 122 cf. Maynard, 1985a, p. 218) writes that the everyday interactional spheres "are always part of more complex social settings."

The question which arises is, how far does one extend the analysis of these more complex settings? There are precedents already set in most conflicts for how contextualization can make an impact on the interactions between primary disputants. Indeed, in many instances, the immediate backgrounding contextual elements actually become primary, taking over the focal event in which the primary disputants are engaged.

This fluctuation between context as background and context as foreground in an immediate event as well as the embeddedness of the immediate context within the broader social context are both areas in need of further research. It is at these nexus points that the true interconnection between human beings in conflict is found, putting to rest at last the myth of people as disconnected individuals who are solely in control of their own lives. Interpersonal conflict is larger than the two primary disputants. In varying ways, it draws on historical memories and pulls in other community members as well.

While conflicted communication behavior is not based solely on individual choice, although this can and does have some bearing in some cases, neither is it completely at the mercy of a structural determinant. And in order to keep this analysis from slipping completely into the arms of the pure and positive structuralism,[12] I must emphasize that myriad behavioral/contextual possibilities exist. Although I am attending to the general patterned aspects of

conflicted communication, these are not to be taken as prescriptive or self-fulfilling. As my participants say, "Shit happens." In other words, one may have one's theoretical ducks all in a row, but the row can easily be re-arranged.

Conflict behavior is guided by the internal patterned regularity of acts and events within a conflict situation. This patterned regularity is itself not only dependent upon a variety of factors including socio-cultural patterning,[13] but is also acted upon by such factors as well. Conflict behavior is also mediated by contextual factors which are sometimes prominently visible and sometimes veiled in a haze. When these contextual elements are prominent, they have the power to directly take over the turning of events. When they are hazy, they still exert power, but less directly, perhaps. Goodwin and Duranti (1992) address this phenomenon, stating that

> Unfortunately, because the structural articulation of the focal event is matched by an apparent clarity in its shape, outline, and boundaries . . . it becomes easy for analysts to view the focal event as a self-contained entity that can be cut out from its surrounding context and analyzed in isolation, a process that effectively treats the context as irrelevant to the organization of the focal event. (p. 11)

It is for this very reason, the emphasis on a single event dissociated both from the immediate and broader contextual dimensions and the broader sociality, that school mediation programs which are designed to resolve conflicts (another interesting idea)[14] fail. The standard

mediation process being imported into schools and exported to other nations is dominated by a perspective which assumes that a conflict is (or can be) bounded by a segment of time and thus the primary disputants can be removed from a context in order to analyze and resolve their dispute. Such projects are bound to have disappointing outcomes because in many participants' minds, acts and events can not be de-contextualized or de-historicized.

Time and again, throughout Walnut School mediation sessions, my adult co-mediator and I would give each other the "Where did **that** come from?" look when a disputant would say something that to us seemed absolutely irrelevant and inconsequential. At other times, I would find myself asking silently, "Why can't they (the disputants) just forget about this?", while my spoken questions in my role as mediator would reveal my intention that disputants should both de-contextualize and de-historicize in order to move through the mediation process and reach resolution through agreement.

While a critique of the premises and assumptions of the mediation process is not the focus of this study, it was my and the students' interactions within the mediation process that allowed me to bump against many of the qualities of youth conflicted communication which are presented in this document. In order to be sensible in the wider terrain of family, neighborhood and community, conflict acts and events must be considered within the

immediate local as well as the broad social domains. The continuous and progressive nature of conflicted communication must be taken into account in any study which purports to identify the practices of a particular group of youth.

End Notes

1. These stages may also be named *latent* and *manifest* (see C. Moore, 1991, p. 16) but when these terms are used, it is within the "conflict punctuates or disrupts our otherwise smooth relationship" view.

2. Even though this is my preferred terminology, I will alternate between several terms: conflict, conflicted communication, conflicted interaction. They should all be interpreted along the same lines as conflicted communication.

3. There is a theory of societal cooperation and a theory of societal conflict as the underpinning of social interactions. However, I do not find either theory of much use except that both provide a researcher with a foundation from which to build subsequent theories and thus provide a window with a particular frame from which to view the workings of a segment of society.

4. Many researchers (Maynard, 1985a, p. 213; Keenan, 1977, p. 126; MacKay, 1974; Speier, 1973) now regard children's language code as having an integrity of its own rather than being considered to be immature forms of adult language.

5. Benbow (1994, p. 205) suggests that "socializing carries in its meaning the imprinting of authority."

6. The phrase "multiple realities" was first used by Alfred Schutz in an article entitled, "Don Quixote and the Problem of Reality," in Collected Papers Volume II Studies in Social Theory. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971.

7. I am using the words structure and structural in this chapter in the classical linguistic sense, meaning that there is an overarching framework within which bits and pieces of conflicted communication fit.

8. M. H. Goodwin conducts excellent research in this genre among urban African-American children.

9. "Discourse" is used in the sense defined by Foucault as being "a cultural complex of signs and practices that regulates how we live socially" (Goodwin & Duranti, 1992, p. 30).

10. Hymes uses this terminology to define the terrain of speech. I have borrowed this framework and terminology and applied it to the study of conflict as a way of being able to deconstruct conflict communication in a certain group.

11. Marjorie Harness-Goodwin (1990, 1982a, 1982b) has explored instigating among urban African-American pre-adolescents and demonstrate how a speaker can incite a recipient to a future confrontation with someone who

CHAPTER VII

THE CONSTRUCTION OF ADOLESCENCE AND THE CONTENT OF CONFLICTED COMMUNICATION

So what is at the root of conflicted communication among the adolescents participating in this study? Much of the **content** of conflicted communication within Walnut School is inextricably tied to the social fact and construction of American adolescence itself.

A working hypothesis which I developed early on and which underpins the interpretation of my data is that adolescence, as a transitional period between the end of childhood and the attainment of adult social status[1], is the primary construct which guides and influences the content and forms of conflicts. That adolescence has a particular construction and maintenance in the U.S.[2] through socio-cultural and systemic structures (the family and community, the formal education sector, the media, etc.)[3] is a generally accepted premise among researchers (Whiting & Whiting, 1989, pp. xii-xiii).

Walnut Middle School encircles a group of 1,000 students, some having passed through, some in the midst of and some entering into puberty. Much of the content (the vocal and nonvocal displays) of conflict in this setting corresponds to the sense-making of participants of this particular age group. That sense-making incorporates acts

which are both socio-culturally and developmentally engendered, as was suggested previously.

Consider, for example, the physical acts of a young woman sucking her teeth or a male touching a female's breasts or buttocks. These two physical acts manifest more noticeably in middle school versus the lower elementary grades. The first act, teeth-sucking, is used by adolescent and adult women to audibly mark a psychological/emotional state or attitude.

It is an overt signal, a trigger, that announces the potential for conflict activity. Some young women use this signal frequently with their peers. Whether this use demonstrates the incorporation of a display used by older disputants into the adolescent repertoire or whether the adolescent repertoire has influenced the adult is perhaps not so important as when, where and how it is used, toward whom, and what it accomplishes.

The second act, touching breasts or buttocks, is illustrative of a trigger which emerges out of the change from childhood to adolescence. Triggers such as these are rarely found in younger children's conflicts; if they are present, they may be considered to be indicative of some form of abuse. Triggers which signal emergent sexuality are also accompanied by changes in conflict focal points. For example, there is a dramatic shift in middle school toward conflicted communication situations which have to do with "whose boyfriend he is" for young women and in which

looking good in front of the girls becomes important for young men.

However, having said that the content of conflict runs roughly along age group lines, I must also note that there are broad content categories such as using bad language which do remain consistent across grade levels, but which may shift in actual linguistic content. For instance, in a cross-age study involving students from four schools (two elementary, one middle and one high school), Farley-Lucas, Hale and Tardy found that students in third and fourth grade had begun to make "Your mother" statements. According to one student in their study, "The difference is that back then (grades three and four) it was 'your mom's ugly' and now (beyond grade four) it's unmentionable words" (1993, p. 11).

For the participants in my study, the current favorite "your mother" trigger is: "Your mama's so greedy, when somebody said it was shitty outside, your mama went and got a bowl."

During this time of public school encirclement, the youth continue to incorporate both child- and adult-centered content. Some of the content is borrowed from their younger days, some is borrowed from older actors and some is purely of their own creation and contingent upon context. Katz, in her research on sex role socialization, uses the concept of continuous socialization across the life span. This construct encompasses the essence of what

I observed with regard to the developmental aspects of adolescent conflict--the process of incorporation. It also supports the need for more empirical studies "with adolescents and research that attempts to link childhood socialization experiences with adult attitudes" (1987, p. 96).

But what Katz does not emphasize strongly enough is the other side of the development discussion--the uniqueness of adolescent systems which was addressed previously in this document. For example, some of the forms of conflict, especially those addressed within this paper, give students the chance to manipulate their own specific sophisticated forms of conflict behavior which can coax an entire social-familial circle into motion[4].

And What of Locus and Class?

Aside from incidents-in-isolation which are restricted to a particular mono-dimensional issue typically 'resolved' one-on-one, adolescents continue to explore the highways and by-ways of a complex system of conduct and use that system to meet their own socio-developmental and communicative needs.

This statement brings me to a second hypothesis which is supported by an emergent body of ethnographies of diverse schools (Wexler, 1992) and of classrooms (Barnhardt, 1982; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982; Philips, 1982; Heath, 1983; Michaels & Collins, 1984): that the

construction of adolescent behavior is also strongly tied to physical locations and socio-economic and ethnic mixes of students. Schools with different locations and differently-backgrounded student populations exhibit observable social interaction variations.

Obviously, this is not a new discovery--there are various journals and clearinghouses which deal exclusively with the phenomenon of urban education. However, what is in need of much more extensive examination is the manner in which differences and similarities manifest, considering the backgrounding of students and institutions. D'Amato (1987, p. 358) states that at the macro-level, schools are similar, but different within and Reyes and Valencia (1993, p. 264) state that what is needed is "a framework for analyzing school interaction that preserves both its emergent, developmental and dynamic character and its massive regularities."

The same statements could be made of the needs of conflicted communication research within institutions: what are the massive regularities of youth conflicted communication and what are the particular dynamic, emergent and developmental characteristics of conflict at particular sites? What are the differences within?

Based on the findings of a pilot study I conducted at a high school in Summertown, I began this current study with the assumption that I could examine cross-cultural, that is, cross-ethnic group conflicted communication.

Walnut School, like many others, is the product of controlled integration efforts which are based on contact theory. Contact theory assumes that the co-existence of diverse ethnic/racial groups within an institution will lead to more equal levels of academic achievement and to a greater understanding and acceptance across groups (Schofield, 1989; Fitzpatrick, 1988).[5]

While some studies have shown that academic performance among African-American students has improved in integrated settings, the jury is still out on determining whether contact positively effects inter-group relationships and understandings across all ethnic groups. But there is still little literature available on how inter-group relationships are accomplished, despite the fact that the broad category of cultural difference is often cited as the locus of conflict:

> cultural difference can be thought of as a risk factor in the school experience of students and teachers; it need not cause trouble but it usually provides opportunities for trouble. . . . Those opportunities can serve as resources for escalating conflict that might already exist for other reasons, such as conflict between social classes, genders, or races. (Erickson & Bekker, 1986, pp. 175 & 177)

Walnut School has roughly equal numbers of students with Spanish surnames (41%) and students of Non-White (28%) and White (30%) heritage[6]. This ethnic/racial mix is the result of the attempt by Summertown Schools in 1966 to comply with an historical federal educational law (Chapter 641 of the Acts of 1965) which demanded the establishment

of racial balance and the correction of racial imbalance in the public schools. It is also the result of the Controlled Choice Program, a recent local effort begun in 1991 to give families the opportunity to have some say in deciding their children's school assignments.

Given the relatively equal numbers of students of Puerto Rican, African- and European-American heritage, I thought Walnut School would be rife with inter-ethnic group conflict situations and I eagerly sharpened my pencils in anticipation of copious note-taking. But the conflicts were not happening, at least not between the disputants on whom I had set my sights.

After working in the Walnut School Mediation Program for a few weeks and reviewing the data I had gathered, it was abundantly clear that the conflicts being brought to mediation were not inter-ethnic group conflicts. They were predominantly intra-ethnic group conflicts. I was shocked and surprised. The entire orientation of my study needed to change. While I was still interested in inter-ethnic group conflict, I began to focus instead on the intra-ethnic group conflict which presented itself consistently and continuously.

But I did not want to target a specific ethnic population within the school. Instead, I decided to search for any patterned commonalities within the conflict situations of whomever walked through the office door. As similarities began to surface, I began to look toward other

dimensions than race/ethnicity to gain a toehold on why and how conflicts were manifesting. The question under consideration then became, how much do the patterns associated with lower economic status and urban poverty influence the patterns of conflicted communication within the school and how do those school patterns interact and intersect with familial,[7] neighborhood and ethnic group practices?

In spite of Walnut's racial integration efforts, what is not brought into this intentional mix of students is attention to socio-economic background. 739 out of 963 Walnut students were listed as low income[8]. There are approximately 15 White students (plus a handful of students of color) in each of the three grade levels who are segregated from the school mainstream and placed in the gifted and talented track. Most of this group is not low income. The composition of the gifted and talented track may lead to the perception of some Walnut students that the 224 students who are not low-income are most likely White.[9]

Christina, an 8th grader who describes herself as White and Puerto Rican, and Jamie, an 8th grader who is Black and Puerto Rican say,

Jamie: And, I say it's (Walnut's) probably only like, 45% middle class and 2% high class. Cause most of the time high classes send their kids to Heavenscent to go to school.

Christina: I feel, not to be prejudiced or nothing, I feel mostly all the White people in our school are high class. . . . They feel like they got money. The White people. Cause I see, when there's a field trip, mostly they

> bring the money and everything. (Tape 27, p. 42)

But, contrary to some of the students' perceptions, a significant number of the White students are from low-income families. According to Wexler, differences of class run deeply in the lives of high school students. Looking at the ecological-social settings of three different high schools, he states that:

> The ideal and the route to becoming somebody in the *suburban white working class* is not the same as becoming somebody in a high school in a *professional middle class suburb*. Both are as different from *urban under class* among youths as it is for their parents. . . . What I underline is how much the experience and the meaning of everyday life--perhaps both cause and effect of achievement and income inequalities--are different. It is not simply a question of deficits or deprivation and advantages, but of different lifeworlds and of the dynamic organizational economies that generate and sustain diverse understandings and aspirations. (1992, p. 8)

But I could not deal in general assumptions about socio-economic status. Bell-Scott and Taylor (1989, p. 121) introduce the notion of ecological-social differences between diverse groups of low income people. Citing Wilson (1987), they state that whereas

> a significant number of Black adolescents from low-income families currently reside in depressed, unstable, and socially isolated inner-city areas, White adolescents are rarely to be found in such areas.

This statement fits the Walnut student population. In addition, those ecological and social conditions which are true for many of the Black families are also true for many Puerto Rican families.[10] Because of disparate ecological

and social conditions, one can not assume that the community/neighborhood experiences of Black, Puerto Rican and White students whose families are low-income are comparable in all respects.

This is important to keep in mind with regard to the participants in this study and the conflict patterns which manifest. Particular behavior patterns which are often associated with the 'underclass' are certainly discernible in my data, especially if one chooses to emphasize the "take a problem" approach which unfortunately has often found its target in Black families.

For example, some researchers cite the tendency of depressed, unemployed Black mothers to rely on harsh forms of child punishment, such as yelling, hitting and threats of violence (McLoyd, V.C. University of Michigan); the tendency of financial hardship to enhance a wide spectrum of hostile and threatening acts aimed at adolescents by parents (Conger, R.D. Iowa State University); the tendency of parental discipline to grow harsher as economic disadvantage increases (Dodge, K.A, Vanderbilt University). The list could go on and on. Yet what is seldom revealed is the tendency for the findings to homogenize across racial/ethnic groups as the ecological and social settings become more similar (Bower, 1994).

But what few researchers concentrate on is revealing the positive moral and interactional fibers which also manifest in youth and families put at risk by their

ecological and social settings. According to Erickson, once a strong proponent of the cultural difference thesis who now is incorporating Ogbu's labor market explanation with the communication difference theory to explain school difficulties experienced by many children from minority groups,

> poor children of color or of minority cultural or language background have been seen as inherently inferior, intellectually and morally, to the children of the middle class. In the 1960's, among professional educators, culture deficit explanations began to replace the genetic deficit explanation. . . . Minority children . . . were "culturally deprived" or "socially disadvantaged." (1987, p. 335).

The intent of the current study is not to disprove the cultural deficit theory (although I would be glad of this as a by-product of the study) or to celebrate the lifestyle afforded to people of low incomes (although I hope that some of the strengths of the youth and families whom I got to know will shine through). Rather, the intent is to reveal the dominant patterns of conflicted communication as they present within the school without judging their inherent goodness or badness, and to reveal the ways in which the participants in this study participated as social actors on an ecological-social stage.

The analysis reveals that there are strong ideational and moral characteristics housed within conflicted communication and, despite what mainstream literature would have us believe, most students in my study do not feel that they are morally or behaviorally degenerate.[11] They

oftentimes express resentment toward the power structure of the school which they feel dehumanizes and disrespects them.

They do participate in a conflicted communication system which has particular forms and features which, when decontextualized, can easily be slanted toward a negative rendering of the participants and their identity groups. In an attempt to counter the proclivity in the literature toward deviant characterizations, I have emphasized the necessity of considering the various elements of context.

Won't You Be My Neighbor?

U.S. census data (1991) show that although White children numerically suffer the most poverty, the greatest proportion of poverty occurs among Black children (46%) and Puerto Rican children (48.4%). Even more significant is the fact that Black children are much more likely to live in crowded inner city areas than White children. This is true for people of Puerto Rican heritage as well and is certainly true for a sizeable proportion of the Walnut students.

Geographical location has implications for the sorts of neighborhood conflicted communication patterns children see modeled on a daily basis. A number of students in my study refer to noticeable inter-community as well as intra-community differences in conflicted situations.

Jamie and Christina, talk about the difference between mothers' behavior in Mobury, a predominantly White, white-collar town twenty miles from Summertown and the government-subsidized housing project where Christina lives.

Jamie: Cause I know when I lived in Mobury, I got in so many fights with kids and it was just because I took their toy away, or something. And most of the time **mothers** would come out because I stole their kid's bike.

Christina: See, mothers were involved there, but, you know, they talk it out. **Here**, they fight. Spite, fight. (Tape 27, p. 33)

Valerie: What happens when little kids get into a conflict here (the projects)?

Christina: They fight. The mothers come outside.

Jamie: The mothers come out. The mothers start yelling at each other. Then they start smacking up their own kids. Then the mothers start yelling at each other again//

Christina: And the mothers start fighting. (Tape 27, p. 14)

Eric and his parents, Jose and Haida, talk about the differences to be found within neighborhoods in Summertown. They describe a completely different neighborhood process norm than that which holds in Christina's project. Eric and his family live on a dead end street off of one of the main avenues in Summertown. The dead end street is lined with big maple trees and two-family duplexes.

Eric's father says that all of the people along the street know each other and they know each other's children. They even have neighborhood barbecues in the summer. If a conflict begins between children, an adult talks things out

with the children or the parents of the involved children meet. If a stranger comes down the street, intending to make trouble, the entire street rallies against the interloper. Children on this street feel safe. They know that their parents as well as other adults are watching out for them.

Shonda's family lives in yet another neighborhood. The family is upper middle class. On Shonda's street, most of the houses are single family dwellings. Children play in their own yards or visit other children's yards on invitation. Young children and girls are not allowed beyond the 'good' part of the street without a male attendant. Families know each other and children's interactions are oftentimes supervised by an adult. Children are expected to behave peaceably and nonviolently toward one another.

The four students, Jamie and Christina, Eric, and Shonda, all come from economically, ecologically and socially different backgrounds. While some of the messages regarding conflicted communication given to them by their families are the same, what they see modeled around them is quite different. School is not the only institution with which they must deal. In certain cases, the neighborhood itself can be seen to have the dimensions and functions of an institution. The most extreme case of neighborhood institutionalization being Christina's home, the government-subsidized projects.

In many respects, the school and the poorer neighborhoods are similar. Keeping children physically separated, the most extreme form of avoidance behavior, or very direct, in-your-face confrontation, the most extreme form of recognition behavior, are used by both school and neighborhood. Within the school, if a student has ongoing conflicts with other students, the student is segregated in a special program or moved to another school. In the neighborhood, parents keep their children indoors to avoid fights (and other hazards).

In the school, students move in groups of twos, threes and sometimes more during passing times, eagerly holding on to the few seconds when they can socialize without adult interference. Outside of school, they move in the same sorts of groups or use the telephone and beepers to socialize. Those who are not allowed out and who have no telephone are kept on the margins of the social milieu. Within school and without, students often witness 'in-your-face' confrontations by adults to children and by children to other children.

When students pass through the entrance of Walnut, they all must adapt to the norms enacted there, regardless of what is modeled in their neighborhoods. And the dominant Walnut conflicted communication system is closer in form and feature to the modeling described by Christina and Jamie than to the neighborhood settings of Eric and Shonda.[12]

Rule-Governed Creativity versus Straying from the Path

Adolescent conflicted communication is fascinating in content, form and contextual construction. However, across different groups of participants, whether the groups were constituted and reconstituted along different definitional lines of gender, ethnicity or socio-economics, certain conflict patterns emerged and are thus identifiable as being particular to adolescents at Walnut School.

While no two conflicts are exactly alike, there are interactional rules to which one is expected to adhere and boundaries within which one is expected to remain. This is a strong social norm. Only a handful of the 200+ students I mediated, interviewed or talked with informally dared to break out of the dominant system of conflict.

The reasons for the absence of instances when non-dominant options were chosen could be explained in terms of child development and the social needs of adolescents for inclusion in and acceptance by a group (Brody & Shaffer, 1982). Or one could use a moral reasoning scale and conclude that the other students had not attained an age or a level of maturity where the highest levels of ethical-moral behavior could be accessed (Kohlberg, 1981).

But I contend that the ability to disengage from dominant modes has other roots. It is largely the patterned structures of conflicted communication that are engaged in moment by moment that govern the actions and reactions of the participants. Unless students are given

some chance to question and challenge those structural parameters safely, they tend not to do so, even though they might wish to. For Eric and Christina, two youth who have chosen to disengage significantly from the norm, the alternate behavioral choices may not have come about without disruption of the system from outside sources at a personal level.

Eric describes himself as a bad boy who always got into fights. One day, when he was riding his bike, the minister from a local charismatic church invited him in. Eric found Jesus and a cadre of people who modeled other ways of being in the world. This modeling and Eric's involvement with the church gave him something different to stand on, something other than a fighting "rep" (reputation) by which to define himself to other people.

Eric says,

> See, everybody in this X house, Y house--8th grade respect me, you know. Because they know the way I am. They knew me for so many years, you know. You just got to let those people here respect you, that's it. If you don't let nobody, you know, respect you, if you don't earn your respect, you know, they're not gonna respect you. Just, just got to let them know who you are and what you stand on, you know. You got to tell them to **respect**, you know. That's the way. (Tape 29, lines 357-368)

Christina had to stand up for her belief in nonviolence in a particularly intimidating situation. She describes an escalated situation where she feared for her physical safety and expresses two factors which helped her to remain true to her ethic of nonviolence.

That's what happened between me and Felicia. She was all coming up to me for a stupid reason! I was like, "I **always** hug Ben!" Don't I always hug him? **Always**. He used to be my boyfriend, so I always hug him. And so she's getting mad and--"Why you hugging him? I'm gonna beat you up." And this and that. "He better--if I ever see you hugging him again, I'm gonna kill you or kick you butt"--or something. I don't know. So I just left all cool, calm. "Naw," I said, "I can't get in a fight. I'm a mediator. My doctor said if I get in a fight . . ." He got me scared cause he said I might have another surgery. So I didn't want to get in a fight cause they could kick me in my leg. So I was like, "Naw, man. I'm not even gonna try it. I'm a mediator." So I went up to the thing, where I always go, where I always hang out. She's like all coming up there with DOLLY! EVERYBODY that I don't even know! She's like, she's like, "Whatchu said? Come here, Ben." Ben came up there. She's like, "Did you hug her yesterday?" He was like, "Yeah." And she goes, she said something to me and I was like, "I ain't even gonna say nothing to you all. Cause you all all screaming at me, pointing in my face. I ain't even saying nothing." And so I was like, like that. And they was all pointing in my face saying, "You better tell me! You better tell me if you were trying to hug him or I'm gonna slap you. I'm gonna slap you!" I said, "Yeah, I **did** hug him! What? That ain't bad. I always hug Ben." So they were like, "Well, if you hug him again--." This and that, this and that. So, Ms. P. came up there. Mr. A. And they were holding me back. I wanted to run home cause I was very scared. Cause all these black people. I was very scared. Katie, nobody helped me. You know, if that was my friends, I would be right there helping. They was all like, "UUUUHHH. I didn't even know what's going on." But when they have problems, I'm right there for them. NO! They was right there and I was all there--crowds of BLACK PEOPLE, BLACK PEOPLE GALORE! ALL AROUND ME! I was like, I was like, brown knees everywhere. But they were all like, trying to gang up on top of me. (Tape 27, pp. 28-30)

Without the external intervention of the church, the mediation program, and a doctor, it is likely that these two students would have had even more difficulty

circumventing the system--"disembed(ding) themselves from formalized, already constructed, systems of knowledge" (Benbow, 1994, p. 204) and processes of conflict behavior in which they were enmeshed. The importance of having such external connections is indispensable to youth lodged in a particular system and environment where there are few opportunities, in school or out, to witness alternative values and responses.

Peter, an African-American seventh grader, describes his efforts to achieve an uneasy harmony between his transformed values and the demands of the dominant conflicted communication system of which he, unlike Eric and Christina, has chosen to remain a part.

Peter: Then they want to go beat him up for no reason! Just because the way he look. "Let's go beat him up." Come on, man. Don't make no sense.

Valerie: Well, how'd you get so sensible?

Peter: (embarrassed laugh) Hurting people. Cause I used to jump people all the time. Just to see them hurt. They'll look up and say, "I didn't do nothing to you." That changed me completely. Whenever I do have to get into a fight, I make sure it's one on one, cause I wouldn't want nobody jumping me.

Valerie: But what changed, Peter?

Peter: All right. You know when you fight somebody, you knock them down, gonna want to kick them. After you finished doing that, they look all bloody at you, "Why?" You know what I'm saying? It could be over something stupid why you fought them, too, he say she said. Some stupid stuff. They'll look, "I didn't do **nothing** to you. Why'd you hit me? Why is you bothering me?" And that'll change, right, after a certain amount of time, cause nobody's that--nobody's heart is that cold. (Tape 17, lines 180-207)

> I earned respect for my hands, hurting kids. Now, down here, 7th grade, everything got to go through me before it happens. "Are we gonna fight this kid?" I got to approve it before they do it. So. That's the way it works in 7th grade. Everything goes through me before it happens. That's why there's not many fights in 7th grade no more. 'Cept when the girls is fighting. I got no control over them. (Tape 17, lines 289-301)

I Want to Get Out of This Place

These three students are rather exceptional in their particular choices and the ways they have devised to remain true to those choices. Many students stick to their socialized conflict paths even though they may long to experience another sort of reality. A number of students expressed a strong desire to be someplace else, to escape from the setting and the negative aspects of the conflict system.

Some students believe the key which unlocks the escape door is graduating from middle school and moving into high school; for others, the key is re-locating entirely to a nearby, predominantly white collar small town or even to other states. Christina, Jamie and Maria express similar sentiments: "I'm sick and tired of going to a school everybody crackin' on each other" (Christina, Tape 15, lines 400-402);

> "I want to get out of here (with laughter). I don't want to stay here. I want to just go to high school, chill out, like I don't ?? problems at Walnut, trying to get away from the problems." (Maria, Tape 15, lines 713-718)

Christina: My mom, ...she's trying to worry about getting out of this project.

Jamie: My mom wants to get out of the whole **city**. (Tape 27, p. 40)

Students expect that other places are different and that out of an environmental change will emerge the possibility of leaving the violence, the crackin' and the general negative atmosphere behind. Changing location means opening up new ways of being in the world which seem impossible or, at the very least, implausible and dangerous in the current setting. What most of the students do not recognize is that the degree to which they have internalized these patterns will likely determine the degree to which they attempt to utilize those patterns in other settings.

While Christina says,

> I'd love to live up there (Mobury) where it's nice and peaceful because I can't stand it around here. I don't think there's no kind of peaceful place around here. Everywhere you go, you're gonna see somebody that's gonna try to hit you (Tape 27, pp. 32-33),

Jamie, Peter and Eric identify the difference that setting and social group affiliation make on the interpretation of one's actions and the subsequent results.

Jamie: When I was small, she (mother) taught me a lot different than she is right now. Cause when I lived in Mobury (small, predominantly white town), I **could** be tough. Mobury, you had to be tough cause you had to look good and if you could beat up somebody, you wouldn't look good to the teachers and stuff, but to the kids you would. Nobody'll mess with you. (Tape 27, pp. 37-38)

Peter: If you're causing trouble and get into a lot of fights, you get a reputation and people respect you (in Summertown/Walnut School).

Eric: That's what they think, that you get a rep. But you **don't**. You **lose** a rep.

Peter: That's what I'm saying that with, with certain people you gain a rep, reputation, and you, with other people, you look stupid. So, it's whoever you want to impress. You got to do certain things. (Tape 29, lines 391-400)

Within Walnut, the highest status "rep" is gained by being good with one's hands and having "mad back-up" though there is some admission that this kind of a rep is a liability in other venues.

The most noticeable instances where these mismatches between patterned responses and context manifest are in the student to adult school interactions. Teachers often confront differences in conflict forms and functions head on. This was hinted at in Chapter IV. But it is beyond the scope of this paper to adequately explore the thematic content of adult to student interactions. Suffice it to say that the students often feel as though they are choosing forms of action which safeguard the home value--a system of beliefs which oftentimes has literally been beaten into them. But when they get to school, they are subsequently punished for such loyalty to the teachings from home.

Other noticeable mismatches that are more germane to the focus of this study are those which occur between those students who have grown up witnessing and using the forms and norms of the predominant conflicted communication

system and those students who are attempting to enter into the system. I made a previous claim that most of the students at Walnut recognize the dominant conflicted communication patterns. I maintain this assertion. However, recognizing and being able to perform those patterns are two different things. What some students, such as those in the following situation, have not mastered is the level of sophistication achieved by other students.

One might make the argument that these students are not attempting to imitate the dominant patterns, but are displaying their own unique forms. To such an assertion I would reply that while there is uniqueness in the forms, it emerges not out of a void, but out of the context[13] which the students create and the setting in which they find themselves. If they are to be active members of the social milieu, they must be able to manage the dominant forms successfully or continually suffer the consequences of mismanagement.

Although there is a degree of variance in the manners in which particular students of similar backgrounds respond to conflict triggers[14], in general, students are able to utilize similar patterns of conflict processes. A Hymesian term, "rule-governed creativity" (1974, p. 112), captures this essential feature of adolescent conflict. Having said this, a handful of discrepant cases--what I call mismatches at the socio-cultural and socio-economic level versus individual interpersonal differences--presented themselves.

Preliminary analysis reveals the threads of ethnic-specific content. A deeper examination of the weaving of ethnic-specific and/or social class content into conflicted communication is a site for further research.

However, for the purposes of illustration, I will provide an example of ethnic-specific content in a situation between Donald and Willie. Donald, a European-American 8th grader allegedly said he had "scored with" (had intercourse with) Maggie, an 8th grade Puerto Rican young woman. Willie, also an 8th grade Puerto Rican student and Maggie's good friend, heard the rumor and he "got angry so he went up to Donald and he threw him against the side of the wall" (Maggie, Tape 20, lines 12-14).

Within this conflict, one can identify several Puerto Rican ethnic-specific themes or historical sociocultural premises (HSCPs)[15] (Diaz-Guerrero, 1987, p. 239 in Phinney & Phinney). Within traditional Puerto Rican culture, there is an emphasis placed on female virginity, machismo, and family honor. By defending Maggie in a physically aggressive way for an (unproven) assault on her sexual morals and by implication on her family honor, Willie places himself firmly on traditional Puerto Rican cultural soil. Danny pled innocence, but during the mediation, Maggie requested that Danny keep his distance from her and her friends. The cultural borders were pulled shut and firmly excluded Danny from further contact with Maggie and Willie's group of friends.

Other examples of HSCPs are available within my data, but again, such a specific emphasis on intra-group cultural content is not the focus of this study. It remains an area in need of research.

The Effect of Ethnicity/Race on Conflict Patterns

Broadly speaking (not to mention grossly generalizing), the only finding that had any discernible connection to ethnicity/race can best be summed up in a statement on family: many Black and Puerto Rican students tend to engage extended family back-up in their conflict situations, whereas most White students tend not to engage extended family back-up. Given the value placed on familism[16] which is a commonly documented cultural attribute among people of Black and Puerto Rican heritage, this is not surprising. According to Sommers, Fagan and Baskin, writing on Puerto Rican realities,

> Even among adolescents with low socioeconomic status (SES), absent fathers and troubled family relationships, the value of familism may be invoked by parents or other family members to restrain the propensity to engage in antisocial behavior.[17] (1993, p. 39)

Familism of this sort is not considered a strong cultural attribute among many White families. Within the Walnut context, the absence of a White tradition of back-up may be due to this lack of familism. Or it might be due to the fact that none of the White students mentioned siblings who attended Walnut. Either those siblings do not exist or they remain out of the conflict picture due to their age.

Bring in the Adults

Related to the construct of back-up is the engagement of adults with more power into conflict situations. Using a series of videotaped social encounters of children in everyday settings to elicit student responses, Phinney and Rotheram (1987) found that Black children tend not to go to a teacher when peers are fighting, but handle the situation themselves. However, the data, both interview and observational, which I have available do not support this finding. Indeed, a number of times, Black students in my study said that they and other Black children tell a teacher when a situation is happening, as do White and Puerto Rican students.

Where the difference may lie, however, is in the way in which some White students and Black and Puerto Rican students without back-up bring their parents or other authority figures into conflicts. Perhaps because of the lack of tradition of back-up among many of the White students, some of these students turn to people whom they perceive as having more authority, rather than attempting to take on a student who has back-up or to take part in a conflict process which they may not fully comprehend.

For example, Danny, the White 7th grader mentioned previously, has no back-up and no close social group. He tells his father of a problem with another boy, Jesus, a Puerto Rican boy who has back-up. Danny's father then goes to the assistant principal and the assistant principal

intervenes with Jesus. Some Black and Puerto Rican adults intervene in this same way, particularly if their child has no back-up. In other instances, the school administrators are invoked only when parents need their assistance in removing a child from one school setting which is perceived to be socially and/or physically dangerous to another less dangerous setting.

Parents of disputing children who are related by family or strong friendship ties or neighborhood norms have different intervention mechanisms. In these instances, the parents expect the children to solve their conflict situations in a manner that solidifies and strengthens rather than weakens the communal ties that bind them. Oftentimes, the parents will talk together and pressure the youth to heal any breaches. Fear of another student's parent's reaction also stifles inter-family conflicted communication.

Out of twenty instances of adult participation and/or intervention in youth conflicts, a patterned consistency was discernable. I used these instances to construct a generic model which articulates the interface between child and adult involvement. This model captures the typical states of escalation-power intervention and accommodates all of the instances I encountered. The most significant factors in determining where and how extensively a family engages this cycle are strongly influenced by socio-economics and neighborhood norms, and the degree of

conflict intensity and protraction. Ethnicity/race alone do not seem to be relevant indicators of process in most instances.

Figure 11 illustrates a generic model of the scope and sequence of protracted, highly-escalated conflict situations which involve extended back-up and which move across a variety of institutional levels. However, there are discernible structural levels which have particular human resources associated with them.

Depending upon the protraction, the degree of escalation, and the scope of human resources available at any given level, all or only some of the levels/human resources will be tapped. For example, family intervention may occur at any point within this sequence.

Some conflict situations will follow the whole sequential cycle through; others will skip certain phases, for example, calling upon school authorities to intervene. Some conflict situations will go quiet once school authorities have intervened while others will become more active as a result of the intervention. In addition, and again depending on protraction, escalation, and available resources, it may take months or years to move through the institutional levels, or it may only be a matter of weeks or even days.

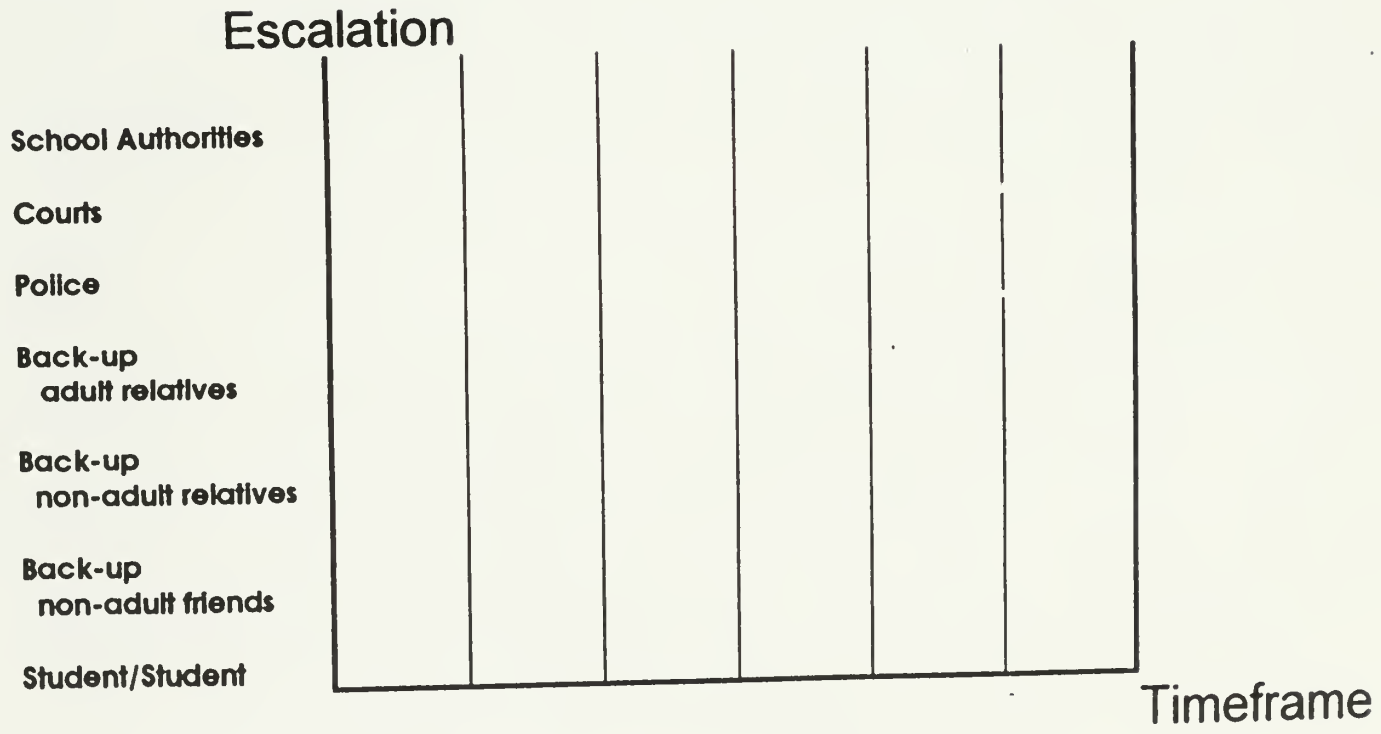

Figure 11. Structural Levels of Conflicted Communication

The following excerpt from a meeting with the Rivera family is quoted at length: first, because it demonstrates the sequence two families of similar economic and neighborhood conditions but different ethnicities passed through in a particularly protracted and intense conflict and; second, because it illustrates the importance of viewing conflict situations in a more holistic manner where the fluidity of boundaries between institutional settings mentioned previously as well as the potential for violent escalation and the involvement of wide range of participants must be taken into consideration when dealing with adolescent conflicted communication.

The Situation

Martina was in a fight with Selena. Selena had been sending triggers toward Martina for several days. One afternoon on the bus, Martina finally acknowledged the triggers Selena had been sending and a conflict act evolved. For the ease of the reader, I have re-arranged the transcript so that it reads chronologically in terms of the escalation and movement toward engaging outside authorities. While this situation is one of the most complex and extreme that I encountered, it is not atypical in terms of scope, sequence, level of intensity, duration and family involvement.

Martina says,

> Well, I was riding on the bus and they pulled my hair. And I said, "What are you doing? Who pulled my hair?" And Selena said, "My sister. Why are you getting in our B.?" So I said, "Well let's talk about it when we get off the bus." So we got off the bus and I said, ""What'd you go and do that for?" And she pushed me and then we started fighting.

Valerie: Where was Delia?

Martina: She left. She was afraid. She's little and ain't never been in a fight before. I told her, if they jump me, you just get away. She was crying. When they jumped me, she started walking away. There was a whole group around us. I knew there was no other way. I had to fight. I knew if I didn't, they'd jump me anyway. Then this man came and pulled me away from them. They came to my house. Selena's mother came and started yelling about how I chased Selena and a little girl. I never did that. I don't even know where Selena lives. How could I go and chase her? Her mother said that if I go back to Walnut, she's going to kick my ass. (lines 110-141)

Father: I was just getting home and a couple of my neighbors come running up telling me Martina was really getting beat up at the bus stop. So I ?? it up there and by that time they was already bringing Martina down and her lips were swollen and a bad lump on her head. And then they came to our house, three, four of them and the mother, too. Hollering and swearing. I didn't say nothing. I said a few words back, but I wasn't going to get into it. I called the police. But that mother. She should have heard her. She wanted to fight my wife. Then about fifteen minutes later, they was back, about eleven girls with things in their hands and they came right up to our door. I called the police again, but they had already left by the time they got there again. I didn't do anything. I didn't want to be the same. If I had to go to court, I wanted to win. You know, these two girls, they had a little fight, a little problem. It happens. And then it's done. But when they bring their family, that's different. That's something else. They shouldn't have done that. They don't know us. They don't know the neighborhood. (lines 40-70)

personal difficulties, the pressures of the social group, or family norms.

Angela says that if it becomes necessary to fight, although through no initiation on her part, she will fight. And Jason, a European-American seventh grader, expresses the impact of his psychology on others in the following conversation with me.

Valerie: Is there some point in time when its easier to stop your anger getting worse and at that point in time you can go tell the teacher you need to see the mediator or just get out of class?

Jason: Sometimes.

Valerie: When are those times?

Jason: When I'm not in a mood to fight.

Valerie: When are you in the mood to fight?

Jason: When I'm in a bad mood before I get to school.

Valerie: What happens to put you in a bad mood before you go to school?

Jason: Depends on what it is. When I wake up the wrong way.

Valerie: How do you handle your temper at home?

Jason: Start swearing at people.

Valerie: Then what happens?

Jason: Get into a fight. (Tape 20, lines 186-203)

But it is not just individual psychology which determines interaction in conflict acts. There were a number of conflict acts cited by disputing students which illustrate the way in which backgrounding elements themselves transform into the focal event. Primary disputants[19] easily become pawns in a process once

secondary participants ("P" in the ethnography of speaking) act upon them, forcing immediate and particular responses. Daisy and Carolina, two sixth grade students of Puerto Rican ethnicity, recount the following story which demonstrates this phenomenon.

Carolina: Well, I heard Daisy wanted to fight me and we were outside and she pushed me and I started to fight with her.

Daisy: Yeah. I didn't push her though. Zelda pushed me into Carolina.

Valerie: So it sounds like you two didn't really want to fight.

Carolina: No, we were just, you know, arguing and stuff. But I didn't want to fight her. (Tape 7, lines 14-24)

Even those students who have somehow navigated the social system in a manner which allows them to deviate from the dominant form while still maintaining an alliance with active participants of that scene have internalized core family values that would eventually force them into action. May is described by a friend as being outside of the conflicted communication system. No conflict content can engage her.

> May never have nothing. She don't mess with nobody. Nobody mess with her. She's quiet. She doesn't do nothing to nobody. (Selena, Tape 30, lines 116-121)

May belongs to a group of girls who, she says,

> ...like, stay to theirselves and mind their business. Say, if Selena or somebody was on the ??. They just ignore it. Keep on going. They don't, they ain't hanging around saying, "Hit them", or "Push them" or "Do something to them." (Tape 30, lines 111-120)[20]

However, when I press May, the broad circles she draws around non-involvement, become narrower.

Valerie: You don't feel any pressure from them to be-- like, for example, if Selena got into a situation with somebody, would she expect you to back her up and be part of//

May: //Yeah, she expect me to, but I won't.

Valerie: And are you still friends?

May: (Nods head yes)

Valerie: How do you think that can be? Cause lots of kids feel like//

May: //Because if you don't want to do something, you don't have to do it.

Valerie: If she were related to you by blood would it still be the same?

May: No.

Valerie: What would change?

May: Um, you're supposed to, like, stick up for family. But friends, you think, friends have a lot of other friends that can back them up besides you.

Valerie: What if nobody was backing Selena up?

May: (3 second pause--no response)

Valerie: What would your parents say if you went home and told them, "I had to back Selena up because nobody else was there and she was getting beat up"?

May: (2 second pause) I don't know.

Valerie: What if one of your cousins got into a situation? Would they expect you to back them up?

May: I guess so. Most of my cousins don't live in Summertown. It's like, one of my cousins lives in Halfolk. I only have two cousins who live in Summertown and she's only, I think, eleven. And the rest are like, say, little kids.

Valerie: What if Michelle got into a situation? Would she expect you to be there?

May: (Nods head yes)

Valerie: Would you be there?

May: Hopefully, yeah.

Valerie: What if you went home and told your mom and dad that Michelle got in a situation and you backed her up? What would they say?

May: They'd say, "You should have because she's flesh and blood. She's in your family. And if you ever get into a situation like that, you expect her to back **you** up." (Tape 30, lines 194-254)

While there are variations in allegiances to family and friends, it is generally expected that a student will back up a friend, although, as in May's case, there are exceptions to that norm. There are no exceptions to the expectation that one will demonstrate allegiance to family in any of my transcriptions. There are some students who do not want to solicit the intervention of family members and indeed resent family involvement, yet if they need, seek or expect help and it is not forthcoming, their most vital social unit will have been betrayed and the betrayer will be properly chastised.

Let's Get Physical

Oftentimes, in conflicted communication events, a disputant may not know or may choose not to perform the steps of the dominant dance. When this occurs, the initiating disputant may continue to push through the coordinated and sequenced exchanges of vocal and nonvocal

displays toward physical contact (see the example of Curtis and Robert, pp. 152-154). Once the line of physical contact is crossed, students react. Indeed, they feel compelled to react. Edwardo, a seventh grade Puerto Rican boy, describes the necessity of carrying through once the physical touch line has been crossed.

Edwardo: I remember I got in a fight with my friend, Pedro. We're still friends, but when we were play-fighting one time--cause we always used to play-fight last year--he accidently hit me in the face really hard because he was only taking a fake swing and somebody pushed me into it. So, I said, "You know, you hit me hard." He goes, "Sorry," he said. (I said) "We'll have to do something about it." "Okay," he goes. So I just put him on the ground real light...(lines 138-149)

Valerie: What did you mean when you said Pedro was taking a fake swing and you had to do something back?

Edwardo: I had to do something back to him.

Valerie: What did you mean by that?

Edwardo: Well, I'm not gonna stay hit. So I said I have to do something back to you cause it didn't look right for me to stay hit. (lines 173-181)

Valerie: What would you have done if there hadn't been people around to see you get hit when he took that fake swing?

Edwardo: I wouldn't have gotten pushed.

Valerie: OK. What if you tripped or something as he was swinging?

Edwardo: What if I walked into it?

Valerie: Yeah.

Edwardo: If I walked into it and there was nobody around, I still wouldn't stay hit. I don't like being--staying hit. I always have to have the last hit. Even if I'm fighting with my brother, I always get the last hit. (Tape 30, lines 190-203)

While this example reveals a blend of an individual's personal preferences and socio-familial conditioning, it illustrates even more clearly the power of social norms. Even though he knows that the intention behind the punch was not to cause harm, Edwardo intentionally interprets the punch itself as a conflict trigger. Indeed, so strong are those patterned responses that Edwardo insists on carrying out the form despite the fact that it is devoid of function and therefore purely symbolic at that point in time.

Clearly Edwardo could have made a different choice (that is, if one is able to dismiss the power of context). In this example, Edwardo's behavior is governed by an intellectual decision. He calmly informs his friend about what needs to happen in order not to disrupt the status quo. He even names the motivation behind his intellectualization--"It didn't look right for me to stay hit"--and demonstrates the power of social norms to determine behavior. What remains un-named are the sorts and sequence of social repercussions which would drum down upon Edwardo had he deviated from the norm--a point at which the backgrounding field of action could easily become the foregrounding focal event.

Don't Stay Hit

It is common for parents to teach children that there are particular responses to particular actions (see Figure 13). We call this socialization. In many participants' families, the emphasis is on establishing yourself in a way which leaves no ambiguity in the minds of those around you about who you are and what you will do.

> "If someone hits you, hit them back harder."
> "If someone says something, say it back louder."
> "Don't come home if you haven't beaten him up."
> "If you're going to fight, I want you to fight in front of me."
> "If anybody touches you, grabs you in a way you don't like to be, you know, you hit back."
> "If she keeps it up, slap her."
> "Did you knock him through the wall?"
> "Don't stay hit."
>
> (Advice from parents to their children)

Figure 13. Advice from Parents to Their Children

Children are instructed in how to maintain a postured response-action-response sequence in situations that are not advantageous to their physical, emotional or academic well-being. The posturing behavior seems to work something like a charm which protects students, keeping other students from messing with them.

Unfortunately, in the Walnut setting, the outcome of the posturing generally results in an increase rather than a decrease in the physical challenges directed toward the

child. Among most students, there is no honor or status in physically taking on someone younger, weaker, afraid. Status lies in taking on the powerful and showing fearlessness; therefore, the physically powerful and active are constantly being drawn into events. A lack of response on their part results in loss of status, loss of face and social significance.

Two eighth grade mediators describe a classmate, Lena, and the liabilities associated with establishing a reputation as an active player in the conflicted communication scene.

Shelly: She's built up this reputation of being so big and so bad that everyone want to be her friend. In 6th grade, she wasn't really pretty and she had problems at home and had no friends. Once they had already built her up to be that great big person, she couldn't, like, back out of it. She was almost like, stuck there in that position and that was her position to be there.

Roberta: I think she's trying to get out of it now, but she's, you know//

Shelly: //Just kind of trapped.

Roberta: Yeah. They want her to be that way. It's like Lena. As soon as you hear, "Lena", you automatically think, "Fight."

Shelly: "Lena, you like salsa?" "No." "You want to fight?" "Yeah." It's like the, it's like they fall into place. (Tape 1, lines 20-34)

The most common injunction parents give to their children is: Don't stay hit. This is a colloquialism for responding physically to a physical affront. There are only a few instances in my data of a student repeating home advice which is contrary to this. In the majority of

students' homes, however, hitting back is the end of the line in a short list of options which include telling the teacher or getting some adult to intervene. As Maria puts it, "She hits me, I'm going to hit back. 'Cause that's what I got hands for."

Students are often dissatisfied with the manner in which their teachers deal with triggers. A common complaint (and justification for hitting back) is, "I told the teacher, and she didn't do anything. So I hit him." Even one of the peer mediators says, "I know there's this thing that you should go get a teacher, but I just don't have it in me" (Tape 1, lines 17-18). Getting a teacher to intervene in adolescent social situations is a betrayal of the peer group itself and students are sometimes reluctant to be the one who alerted the adults.

Many students know that they have their parents' backing so long as they do not throw the first punch. These students know that if they do throw the first punch, they will most likely be punished at home. But some parents openly encourage their children to be the aggressors.

Carmella, a sixteen-year-old seventh grader of Puerto Rican ethnicity, tells what Terri, an African-American friend from the seventh grade, was told by her mother.

> And Terri's mom say, "Yo, anybody mess with you at school, I want you to **hurt** that person. Don't come home until that person is hurt." Her mom told her straight out. Cause she's had too many people messing with Terri already and crackin' on her, I guess. (Tape 33, lines 883-891)

Some students are reluctant to let another be the first to throw a punch. Leaving themselves open to the unpredictability of another's actions or to unanticipated outcomes is risky business. Equally risky is turning your back and walking away from a fight. There are not established protective norms around such behavior and onlookers can take advantage of such circumstances in destructive ways.

Salina and Melinda, two eighth grade African-American women, respond to the difficulties of engaging in the "walk away from a fight" alternative, breaking the contextual gridlock, so to speak.

Valerie: Melinda, what if somebody just walks away?

Salina: But, you all think it's easy to just walk away from a fight. It's not easy at all//

Melinda: //It was my father. It's not easy walking away from no fight//

Salina: //because last year, this boy caught hisself walking away from a fight and got hisself busted right here in the ear with a lock. Had a hole right here. I don't even think he could hear right now out of that ear cause he got busted with a lock. And there ain't nobody--I didn't even see the lock and I was standing right there. Just swung it.

Melinda: My father said if I had a chance, to walk away from a fight. If I turned around and she hit me, I swear to God, she--//

Salina: //But you know something--could just pull a knife--could just do anything. It's hard to turn your back. And it's even hard not to swing first cause they could be like this (demonstrates swing) and swing at you--be try--they could just knock you out the first hit. (Tape 17, lines 488-513)

Being in Control, Being Out of Control

In the excerpt above, Salina identifies another aspect of the participants' approach to conflict: one controls a situation through action. Students verbally acknowledge this need to be in control or to regain control in several ways. At some point in time, however, a situation moves out of one's control, either due to circumstance or another individual's actions. When a situation begins to move beyond the individual's control, psychological overload statements are made. Such statements often make reference to the participants' nervous system.

Marian: "One time I dissed you because **you got on my nerves**" (Tape 17, lines 107-108);

Jerry: "**I'm tired of it.** Why everybody got to come to me? **Getting on my nerves**" (Tape 17, lines 201-203);

Teresa: ". . . one of these days she's just going to **get so much on my nerves**, I'm just going to hit her" (Tape 15, lines 228-231).

Psychological overload statements accomplish three main functions. They are: an acknowledgement of the fact that a situation or an individual is beyond one's personal means of control; an expression of the need students feel to regain control again in some way; and a warning that eventually the individual will regain control of a situation through an action.

"I Got a Bad Temper"

Related to psychological pronouncements are statements which reveal something about one's temperament or

personality. Students often refer to their tempers as a way of justifying particular responses to triggers and as a way of giving warning that a provocation will likely result in harm.

Jamie: Cause I'm the type, like, I'll snap if anybody even pushes me wrong (Tape 27, p. 37);

Mandy: I be having a attitude. I be having my mood swings.

Sara: Listen to her now, cause she ain't lying. Like she got PMS every day. (Tape 17, lines 666-669);

Edwardo: I'm not trying to sound bad, but I have a very bad temper. (Tape 29, lines 233-234)

What these statements indicate is the perception that a person can always be rather close to the edge of controlled versus out of control behavior and the distance between the two states of being is never very great. Several students expressed admiration for their parents when the parent had gone out of control. Oftentimes, the students had no words to indicate what would happen when such a state was reached. Being out of control is equated with being powerful and it can demonstrate how much a parent cares for his/her child. Selena describes how her parents' reacted when she came home with a scratched face. "My mother was going buck wild. My father ain't heard about it yet, but when he does----------" (Tape 2, lines 23-25).

Eric describes his stepfather's reaction to a situation in which Eric was in mortal danger.

Eric: You know, my father, he takes on the drug dealers and the gangs and stuff. He had them all

cleaning out the church one day. And one day I was walking home from school, you know, like this (demonstrates carefree walk--arms loose and swinging and happy expression) and there was this drug dealer with a gun pointing at another guy and BAM, it burned me. If I hadn't jumped back, I'd probably be dead right now, it was that close. But it, you know, did this (shows scar on face). I told my father about it and I've never seen him get so mad. He went out and found that guy and put his knife up to his throat and said, "If you ever do anything like that to my son again, you'll be dead." And my mother was crying and telling him not to go.

Valerie: She was worried he'd get hurt?

Eric: Naw. She was worried he'd kill him and go to jail. That's when I knew he really loved me. Man, I never thought he'd do that for me. (Tape 40, lines 100-122)

Physical force is an admired quality. Children try to emulate and exhibit physical force. Being out of control goes hand in hand with being physical. These are acceptable responses to trying situations which warrant such reactions. These responses underline the inviolability of the parent-child/family-child connection.

However, out of control responses are not acceptable from all adults. Many students feel very strongly that teachers should not exhibit out of control behavior. They have different expectations of what constitutes appropriate behavior (and appropriate motivations for such behavior) on the part of teachers and administrators. There is an expectation that teachers should control themselves, regardless of the provocation. Yet, students often see school personnel acting in ways which do not model alternate non-violent behaviors and choices.

Eric describes an outburst by one of his eighth grade teachers and his view of that outburst.

> But Ms. Sour, man, boy, she really did something that---you know, on the day the heat was off, I was in class and just sitting and minding my own business and doing my social studies work and all of a sudden she starts yelling, "I can't take it anymore!" And she throws her purse and it almost hit the window and money flying out and stuff. I mean, what's she got to go and do that for, in front of the students? How can they see that? (Tape 40, lines 127-135)

Such out of control behavior is not exhibited because any sacred bond has been violated or because a family prize has been damaged, but because the teacher is unable to control herself in a taxing situation which is just as physically uncomfortable for the students. Whereas the parents were admired for their extreme behaviors which can serve to validate and strengthen kinship bonds, teachers lose the respect of their students when they act in superficial ways.

The Influence of Gender

A good deal of conflict literature focuses on gender differences (typically it is only the gender of the participants that is identified, not their location in any other socially constructed group), "with girls traditionally being assessed as less competent because they tend to use compromise or avoidance strategies, while boys are assessed as more competent because they are more assertive and confrontational" (Farley-Lucas, Hale & Tardy,

1993; Sheldon, 1982). This generalization is not borne out by my data; rather, the opposite is found to be the case.[21]

I would like to note that I did not set out to, as Thorne puts it, "abstract gender from social context, to assume males and females are qualitatively and permanently different" (Thorne, 1986, p. 186). I assumed that being an adolescent in a particular setting took precedence over gender constructs. M. H. Goodwin (1990, 1983a, 1983b, 1982a, 1982b, 1980), who has conducted numerous detailed conflict discourse studies of Black urban pre-adolescent children, begins from the theoretical stance that girls and boys utilize the same discourse patterns, but that variations in usage also exist.

Patterned Forms

Participants in my study identified both similarities and differences between girls and boys. Edwardo gives a succinct rendering of some of these characteristics broken down along gender lines.

Edwardo: Usually, when I go to the park, there's a whole bunch of girls together, walking around. And then one of the girls that was with them starts fighting with another girl.

Valerie: Within the group?

Edwardo: Yeah. And then some girls shun, um, some of them go with one girl, the others go with the other. And then they start fighting when they say something back and forth. Like, one calls one a B. They go, "Oooooooo." Then the other calls the other one a Ho. They go, "Oooooooo." Then they slap each other and start scratching.

Valerie: Do you see the same thing happening with boys?

Edwardo: (Shakes head no) Nope. Just a group of boys will come across another group of boys. (Or) two boys will meet in the park and they'll say, "Stay right here, punk." Then they'll go get their friends and they'll go get their friends. And then they'll meet up. Then the other two start to fight and when one person jumps in, another person, the other person starts jumping. And pretty soon you got the ?? rumble. (Tape 30, lines 209-258)

In general the differences between boys' and girls' conflict patterns are found in two main areas: the preamble to the actual physical confrontation and the involvement of peers. Girls often take a relatively long period of time to heat up to the point of a physical fight. Days, weeks and even months may go by with insults being traded back and forth or eyes being rolled.

The female peer support group may change its composition as well, especially as the conflict starts to get heated up and the trust levels between friends are called into question. If the friendship group stays intact, then secondary conflict situations usually are generated between the girls aligned with each primary participant. Consequently, a dispute between two primary participants often ends up creating numerous secondary conflict situations between members of the two groups which take on lives of their own.

Many boys, on the other hand, believe that they conduct conflicts in a much more straightforward manner than do girls. Generally speaking, a boy will find another boy's behavior offensive and the two will then fight each

other 'head up,' then and there, one on one. Oftentimes, the fight ends up bringing about a friendship between the boys involved.

But there are a number of instances in my data of group behavior among boys of the sort engaged in by girls. However, these group encounters appear to occur more outside of school in the neighborhoods and seldom involve the break-up and reassembly of friendship groups which is present in female conflict situations.

Among both boys and girls there are numerous occurrences in my data of an individual being coerced or forced into a particular action by a group. Gender seems to be of no consequence when a crowd senses the opportunity to manipulate a physical confrontation.

Gender-specific data collection coupled with ethnic/racial identity profiles remains an area in need of further study. The findings presented in this document are gender-specific only. I have not comparatively analyzed the conflict forms and content of young women who identify with a particular ethnic/racial group; however, there are indications within my data of ethnic/racial-specific behaviors as well.

Conflict Content: The Nuts and Bolts of Conflicted Communication

I have selected out some of the key nuts and bolts of adolescent conflicted communication for presentation within this paper. These nuts and bolts come from the thirty-

three triggers which were identified and categorized in Figure 9. I chose these particular examples based on the fact that they are mentioned the most often in my data.

Insults

Insults centering around an individual's appearance are commonplace at the school. In one potentially volatile conflict situation, rumors began to circulate that a certain African-American girl with a reputation for being a punk (fighter) was left out of a picture-taking event. One of her friends supposedly had said, "Let it just be us. Because Sheila, she ugly and she ain't got no hair" (i.e., longer, straighter hair).

Jamie, the African-American/Puerto Rican boy, and Christina, a young woman who identifies as White and Puerto Rican, brought economics and family into considerations of appearance.

Jamie: I care about me looking good, 'cause if I don't look that good, then my parents might look that good, too. And I'm not rich, but I'm not poor.

Christina: But, see, it's, in Walnut, I see, I see White people, right? They have money to go to Paris. You know the school, they went to Quebec? They went there, right? But you see the way these kids be dressing in school? I be seeing holes in their shoes, in their sneakers. And I'm like, look at me. Look at me. I don't--my mom doesn't **even** have that much money. But she cares the way I dress because people will think that, you know, you don't have nothing. You know, the day of dress up day, some girls told me to go **home**. I was like, "Just because **you** ain't dressed up nice!" (Tape 27, pp. 4-5)

Once again, these quotations depict the complex blending of individual, family and cultural sentiments. In the mainstream United States culture, often described as a culture of materialism, it is important to look as though one possesses some material wealth. But there is a fine balance in some Walnut students' minds between looking good and being perceived as looking too good, having something and being perceived as having too much.

For some students, such as the White students Christina mentions who are outside of the main body of students, in this case because of socio-economic factors, having more than others is not problematic in the social milieu of the school. For someone like Christina, however, who is part of the school's dominant social mainstream, looking too good and having too much, even for one day of school, brings harassment and unkind comments.

A common complaint which is voiced across gender, economic and ethnic lines has to do with a student or a group of students demonstrating their superiority over others. Generally, the perception of superiority is rooted in something intangible--generally non-verbal behaviors. Or the perception arises because the person verbalizes the accusation that another classmate feels superior. While a number of different descriptive phrases are used to identify this undesirable character trait, the most common expression is: "thinks he's all that." Yolanda, a sixth

grader of Puerto Rican heritage and Nichelle, a sixth grader of European-American descent said:

Yolanda: I live right there in Main Street apartments, and I was standing in front of the building like always and her, well, she got her cousin, her sister and all her friends. **She thinks she's BIG!** (Tape 25, lines 11-17)

Nichelle: Cause **she be thinking she's all that** with her friends. (Tape 25, lines 137-139)

Kelly, a second generation Italian-American 8th grader, is quick to guard against any possibility that her words might hint at an inner feeling of superiority over her 'girls" (intimate friends).

> I just told her, I was like, you know, "I bet you--", not in money, we didn't bet for money or anything like that, you know? I was just like, "I bet you he would go out with me." You know? **Not saying I'm all that**, you know, or anything, but I bet you he would go out with somebody from this school. (Tape 21, lines 139-148).

Giving the appearance of being 'all that' can have dangerous repercussions. If enough people perceive that a schoolmate thinks he/she "is all that," it can result in physical harm. According to Nichelle, the sixth grader quoted above: European-American descent:

> And then what happened was, she wasn't in one day and all these girls--cause Eleanor keeps--**she thinks she's all that**, and she gets like, she stuck up her middle finger at all these other girls and all these girls want to beat her up . . . (Tape 19, lines 78-86).

Thinking that you're all that can be demonstrated in a number of different ways. Physical gestures, like the one described above by Nichelle, that are known to be socially inappropriate according to broader prevailing societal

norms, are one way. Different types of talk also indicate an individual's view of self. Yolanda (quoted earlier) describes the offenses of the young woman with whom she is disputing.

> NOBODY LIKES HER! For the fact that **she can't back her shit up**! Nobody!. Nobody likes her. Nobody in this school. Not 8th grade. Out of this school. Everybody don't like her. **She'll talk mad junk** and **she'll deny it.** Like, "Oh, she's nothing," or "She can't fight." (Tape 25, lines 417-430)

Yolanda describes several offenses: she can't back her shit up; she'll talk mad junk; she'll deny it. According to the social norms at Walnut, if you are going to act like you're all that, which you might demonstrate by insulting another person (claiming the person is nothing as a fighter), you had better be able to physically defend that assertion. If you are approached and challenged about your statements and you lie and deny that you insulted the other person, you have descended even lower on the moral order. You, in fact, have become less than nothing. As Jerry, an African-American 7th grader, puts it about a young woman whom he believes lied and then denied the lie: "She done lost her level" (Field notes, p. 49). This social-moral construct holds true for boys as well as girls.

A phrase which is similar in meaning to being 'all that' is 'acting bad'--through words or actions, one tries to look tough and able to fight anyone. Within Walnut there is a social sanction against 'acting bad' without

really being 'bad.' Students are at risk if they try to act bad but don't have the necessary back-up or actual fighting history to pull it off. Maria, a fourteen year old Puerto Rican woman in an alternative classroom gives this advice for a classmate to pass on to her sister who is new to Walnut.

> We're saying she should go to her sister, "Don't act bad in Walnut." Cause she's not--some girls--won't be us--but some girls, if you act bad, they ain't, they're not like us. They're going to **jump** her! So I'm telling her to tell her sister, "Don't act bad in Walnut! Don't talk back." Because if you talk back to a girl--Molina's the kind of girl that she--like Molina and her sister--they're like--Molina's the kind of girl that she told her like--. (Tape 15, lines 243-257)

This chapter addresses some of the repeated value themes and some of the more obvious differences between girls' and boys' conflicted communication. My aim has been to open the doors just a bit onto the complexity of adolescent conflicted communication--to immerse myself in the social world of hundreds of young adults in order to encounter and present their reality with as much integrity as an outsider can ever muster. A great deal more in-depth research, possibly on gender similarities and differences, youth values, socialization, or cultural variations in conflicted communication, to name a few, must be undertaken.

End Notes

1. This definition of adolescence was developed by the Harvard Adolescence Project which conducted extensive cross-cultural fieldwork on adolescents in seven different societies. According to Bell-Scott and

Taylor (1989, p. 119), *adolescence* is variously defined as a specific age category, as a stage in physical and psychosocial development, and as a subcultural phenomenon of Western industrialized societies.

2. Margaret Mead first critiqued the universality of the claims of G. Stanley Hall (1904) regarding the storm and stress associated with adolescence in *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928, p. 5).

3. For a succinct review of the most influential theories of adolescence, see S. Schaeffer Davis and D. A. Davis (1989, pp. 2-6).

4. Hymes (1974) defines a *speech event* as being "restricted to activities, or aspects of activities, that are governed by rules or norms for the use of speech. An event may consist of a single speech act, but will often comprise several" (p. 52). A *speech act* is "the minimal term of the speech event" (p. 53). It encompasses speakers' shared knowledge that is both immediate and abstract and has to do with features of interaction and context as well as of grammar (p. 53).

5. Fitzpatrick (1988, p. 33) states that "Race and ethnic relations is not an area in which impressive theoretical developments take place. Wilson Record's (1983) review of recent literature does not offer much promise of significant breakthroughs."

6. These are the categories used by the Summerfield School District.

7. P.A. Katz (1987, p. 98) states that, with regard to the acquisition of ethnic attitudes, the process of the transmission of these attitudes via parental training has "really never been looked at empirically." Again, the same statement could be made of the transmission of conflict attitudes and beliefs.

8. These statistics are taken from the Individual School Report, Summertown, Massachusetts Public Schools, 1993.

9. What is noteworthy and disturbing at the same time is the demographic information available on Summertown's three high schools which each have a particular educational thrust. Central High School is the 'academic', college preparatory school. It is 46% White; 27% Non-White; 24% Spanish. Commerce is the business high school. It is 21% White; 33% Non-White; 40% Spanish. Putnam is the vocational trade high school. It is 23% White; 35% Non-White; 41% Spanish.

Regardless of socio-economic status, these demographics clearly reflect patterns of a national system of White privilege and power at work.

10. For an excellent review of the state of the literature on poverty and the underclass with regard to Blacks and Puerto Ricans, see Massey (1993).

11. It is necessary, however, to consider the findings of studies on race dissonance (the White preference behavior of Black children). According to Spencer (1987, p. 106), "Forty years after Clark and Clark's initial findings, research has shown the same pattern of race dissonance in three regions: the Midwest (Spencer and Horowitz, 1973), the North (Spencer, 1982, 1984a), and the South (Spencer, 1983)."

12. The research focus on the poor is usually focused on African-Americans. The terms "culture of poverty," the "urban underclass," etc., are usually coupled with the term "Black". Fortunately, use of terms like the culture of poverty is fading. However, they are replaced with other terms that continue to homogenize and stereotype large groups of people. For excellent critiques of the different research needs of Black and Hispanic populations, consult Massey, 1993.

13. While there is no single formal definition of context which is used consistently within social science research, Goffman's (1974) definition of context as a frame that surrounds the event being examined and provides resources for its appropriate interpretation is used in this study. Goodwin and Duranti (1992, p. 3) state that "the notion of context thus involves a fundamental juxtaposition of two entities: (1) a focal event; and (2) a field of action within which that event is embedded."

14. This is an area of study which needs to be taken up within multi-cultural contexts. Hopefully, this study, though it has focused on broadly displayed themes and patterns, will open the door for more fine-grained comparative analyses. Also see Schofield (1989), *Black and White in School: Trust, Tension or Tolerance?*

15. Diaz-Guerrero defines HSCPs as cultural traditions concerning values, beliefs, and behaviors (1987 in Rotheram and Phinney, p. 239).

16. "Familism has been defined as a value system in support of the family that emphasizes the bonds and obligations between relatives and the duty to help and express concern for them (cf. Rogler & Cooney, 1984).

The existence of familism in Puerto Rican tradition has been amply documented in a large number of island-based studies (Landy, 1959; Rogler & Hollingshead, 1975; Tumin & Feldman, 1961; Wolf, 1952)" (Sommers, Fagan & Baskin, 1993, pp. 38-39).

17. Sommers, Fagan, & Baskin (1993, p. 43) also state, however, that youths' negative experiences in school and the shifting of the primary socializing influence to peer groups may weaken the family's control. However, among the participants in my study, the commitment to familism is strongly and regularly articulated.

18. See V. Haugen, 1993a, for a review of the literature on community mediation in the United States.

19. I use the term, primary disputants, to distinguish these students from others who get involved in the conflict as it escalates or mutates. Primary disputants are those persons around whom the particular conflict situation initially centers. However, given the nature of adolescent conflict, the center seldom holds steady.

20. May and Selena could easily be two students who fit the description given by Fordham of "Those loud Black girls." Fordham states that, "for African-American women to be taken seriously in the academy, they must dissociate themselves "from the image of 'those loud Black girls,' whose 'refusal to conform to standards of 'good behavior,' without actually entering the realm of 'bad behavior' by breaking...school rules, severely undermines their limited possibilities for academic success" (1993, p. 22)

21. Sommers, Fagan and Baskin (1993, p. 56) state that more research on Puerto Rican female adolescents is necessary to understand the changing status of girls in adolescent peer groups and the development of unique networks of female delinquents to determine the influence of Puerto Rican cultural norms regarding masculine and feminine behavior. Such research is needed for non-delinquent girls as well.

CHAPTER VIII

SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM AND THE POWER OF WORDS

> And however important to us is the tiny sliver of reality each of us has experienced firsthand, the whole overall "picture" is but a construct of our symbol systems. (Burke, 1966, p. 5)

"Words is Words" . . . Well, Almost

Nothing with regard to conflict can be written in stone. Not even the words being used. As one young Puerto Rican woman put it: "Words is words. Long as she don't get into my daughter's business. Words is words" (Carmen, age 16, grade 7, field notes, p. 6).

Carmen knows that at their most basic level--the phonological-- words have no power and no meaning. Words are given power and meaning through our own on-going unique social, cultural and familial construction and conditioning. They are imbued with symbolic significances which simultaneously spur us into action or reaction and, at the same time, allow us to justify and defend those very action and reaction choices to ourselves and others.

For Carmen, words remain purely phonological utterances with no capacity to influence her actions until the sounds begin to texture themselves into a shape which reveals something about her daughter that others can hear. What most students at Walnut School would recognize when Carmen makes the statement, "Long as she don't get into my daughter's business" is that this is one shorthand way of

revealing an aspect of a value system, or, in Burke's words, an ideology, and the accompanying responses that value system necessitates. But, Burke also asks:

> Do we simply use words, or do they not also use us? An "ideology" is like a god coming down to earth, where it will inhabit a place pervaded by its presence. An "ideology" is like a spirit taking up its abode in a body: it makes that body hop around in certain ways; and that same body would have hopped around in different ways had a different ideology happened to inhabit it. (1966, p. 6)

Burke's notion of ideology is a powerful concept. It supplies the glue which both binds the forms and themes, and also provides us with a window into the 'whys,' of conflicted communication, going beyond mechanistic behavioral descriptions.

The Symbolic Power of Physical Acts

In much the same way as verbal action, physical action is also imbued with its own specially constructed realms of symbolic significance. And, again, these symbolic dimensions depend upon patterns of conditioning and demand particular forms of action and reaction which, in their turn, are dependent upon where a student is located culturally, familially and individually. These layers of multiple conditioning result in broad aspects of uniqueness formed along ethnic and economic lifestyles, for example, and along narrower aspects of uniqueness based in family heritage, individual psychology, neighborhood locus.

In order to develop the notion of symbols and ideology, I will describe a situation which involves Selena, a thirteen-year old African-American woman. When Selena challenged my own conditioned assessment of the importance of responding physically to a physical act which had been directed against her, I was pushed to understand the force in operation behind her words.

Selena: That's the first time I've ever been scratched in the face. It was a shock. My mother was going buck wild. My father ain't heard about it yet, but when he does--(2 second pause). And now my face is going to be scarred. I'm going to get her. I'm going to do to her what she's done to me.

Valerie: Is it worth it, Selena? You might get more hurt than your face.

Selena: What would **you** do? If somebody marked your face? You'd do the same thing. You know you would! (Tape 29, lines 38-48)

On a concrete, purely sensory level, Selena is responding to the pain of being physically assaulted. I was speaking to her on that level. I was puzzled by her vehement rejection of my suggestion that she consider the possible severe consequences of further action on her part. But later during this same conversation, Selena revealed more information about her particular symbol system which helped me to understand the intolerability of having been scratched and marked.

> My mother saw my face and she said, "Look at your face! What you done to your face?" My family, they treasure me 'cause I look like my aunt and I got her name. My grandma said to me I got to take care of my face because my aunt is dead and I'm all they've got left of her. (Tape 29, lines 121-126)

What Selena clearly reveals is the degree to which her responses are the result of both direct and indirect conditioning and the symbolic power of her physical face. Selena's example is especially rich for several reasons.

First, it can be used to demonstrate a concept introduced by Burke (1966)--that it is not the material thing which is described by words; rather, the words and the nonverbal or extraverbal contexts (Malinowski, cf. Burke, 1966) they symbolize actually create the perceived reality of that material thing. In short, Selena's face is not just a physical shape. It is what it is because it has been created by certain words by certain people.

Because of this symbolic power of Selena's physical face, the marring of it is more than a solitary, concrete physical act. For one thing, the marring is a desecration of a material resource in a resource-poor environment. In this setting, many families have little more than the bodies of their children to serve as the "material exemplars of the values which the tribal idiom has placed on them" (Burke, 1966, p. 361).

In other words, Selena feels it necessary to preserve and defend her physical face in the same way that a yuppie might feel it necessary to preserve his/her BMW automobile, because of what it symbolizes and represents on a number of different levels. I did not understand the significance of saving face on both a cultural and a familial level until I challenged Selena's need to respond.

One young African-American man, Martin, a senior in college, interpreted the absence of material goods and the lack of diverse experiences in this way,

> When you don't have anything, when your life is so menial that you haven't got anything except your family and yourself, and you've never been anywhere, and you don't have anything else to widen your eyes, you take care of your family and yourself. Because they're all you've got and that's all you know. (Field notes, lines 343-349)

Words and Acts Together

When certain things become the signs of the genius that resides in the words (Burke, 1966, p. 362), it becomes very important to preserve those things. One is not only preserving the thing, one is preserving all of those unnamed, unspoken constructs of meaning. And consequently, "the things are in effect the visible tangible embodiments of the spirit that infuses them through the medium of words" (Burke, 1966, p. 362).

The marring of Selena's face violates another symbolic realm. Selena has been taught, through her grandmother's words, that her physical face is of utmost importance to the family itself. But the marking of Selena's face moves beyond its symbolic value to the family into a new and even more powerful symbolic field--Selena's honor of and relationship with her grandmother. Selena's scratch embodies the violation of a trust between her and her grandmother, a woman whom Selena reveres beyond anyone else in the world. Her grandmother has admonished Selena to

take care of her face. To understand the power that words uttered by a grandmother have to effect both the definition of the scratching act and the future actions anticipated by Selena, one must understand the grandmother as cultural symbol as well.

The near-deification of the grandmother is a common theme in black literature and is illustrated by the poem in Figure 14.

Strong feelings toward and respect for one's grandmother are common themes voiced by a number of the young people of African-American heritage who were involved in this study. Not only are children admonished verbally to respect their elders, especially their grandmothers, those injunctions are driven home physically as well and make a lasting impression on the child. There are similar sorts of injunctions within many Puerto Rican families with regard to the protection and honor of girls and mothers.

According to Jamie, a fourteen-year-old who identifies himself as both black (African-American) and Puerto Rican but who also claims European-American (Irish) and Native American ancestors,

Jamie: . . . with my family, over there[1], you get loud with my grandmother, or my uncle or my aunt, or any of them, they'll beat you down. Then, one of the kids got to beat you down. Then your mom's gonna beat you down.

Valerie: What do you mean, 'beat you down'?

Jamie: (with a laugh) HIT YOU! And then, if you, I mean, this is only if you get loud with one of the aunts. If you get loud with the grandmother, everybody gonna hit you.

Family Tree

I come from
A long line of
Uppity Irate Black Women
Although they were
Church people
And I'm the only one
Who drinks and cusses
When they
Got on the warpath
They had no match
You think I'm bold
Imagine my grandmother Addie
Raising her umpteen children
During the Depression
Imagine the audacity of
This woman tho only
Went to the third grade
Joining The-Book-of the-Month Club
She gave me a six-volume set of
The World's Best Poetry
When I was seven years old
When I was nine
My grandmother sent
A coupon and one dollar to
Nabisco Shredded Wheat
They sent her a knife
And fork and spoon
She kept them in a yellow
Envelope in the dish closet drawer
She would say they were for me
For when I went away to college
I didn't know what it meant exactly
But I would open the drawer
And look at them
And it made me feel real good
And you ask me how come
I think I'm so cute
Nowadays
I cultivate
Being Uppity
It's something
My Gramom taught me
It's about time
I learned
My lesson

(Kate Rushin, 1990)

Figure 14. Rushin Poem

Valerie: That's a pretty bad thing to do, huh?

Jamie: I learned **my** lessons. (Tape 27, p. 15)

A third realm which is tapped in relation to Selena's face is its power to symbolize her family's

intergenerational longevity. Selena's living, physical face has the power to keep her deceased aunt present and remembered within the family. This realm is perhaps not surprising given the historical conditions of personal loss with which black families have had to deal. By getting her face scratched, Selena has let her grandmother and her family down.

And finally, Selena's face demonstrates her own uniqueness to the world she inhabits every day. On a quite literal level, Selena's opponent had "gotten in her face." Among adolescents in Walnut School there is a great deal of emphasis on "looking good." Selena's good looks have suffered and she is angry about it.

When Selena faces her world, that world will see that she was touched by an opponent. She has literally and symbolically lost face and she is ready to damage her opponent's face in an attempt to recoup those losses. Because Selena has been unable to carry out her particular role in protecting and maintaining the physical and unique non-physical inherited resources of her family, she has ruptured numerous symbolic fields. She is thus driven to re-establish the balance within those fields by doing what was done to her.

The Symbolic Social Values of Fighting

> . . . 'Cause I remember when I was small, I wasn't gonna fight with this kid one time and his mother just kept on yelling, "If you don't kick his ass, you ain't gonna come back inside!

You're gonna stay outside for the rest of the night, now, if you don't kick his ass!" Nah, nah, nah, nah! And I beat the kid up and the mother left the kid outside. (Tape 27, p.16)

It is not uncommon for a child to be encouraged to fight another child such as in the conflict event described by Jamie. The reasons for which parents encourage their children to fight vary. Many people (myself included) are under the impression that pugilism is emphasized because of the dangers of life in the inner city. That is one sentiment which was expressed by students when they were asked about fighting. But other expressed motivations have to do with the symbolic value of fighting. If a child is not a good fighter, the parent(s) loses face in the eyes of the community. One source of pride is eliminated; status is deflated.

In addition, watching your child fight well brings about some sort of emotional uplift and satisfaction. Christina and Jamie describes a situation which Christina observed in her government housing project.

Christina: And then, she has a lot of problems, this girl, Madelyne. That's why she never comes outside no more. She has a problem with this girl, Kissy, down there. This girl, Sherry, right" You know Sherry, don't you? BIG SHERRY? You have to know her. She's BAD! She probably go to mediation every day. Everybody know her. She has problems with her (Madelyne), too. And one day, they were fighting outside (Sherry was outside, Madelyne was inside at the window). Arguing. She was like, "Why don't you come downstairs!" This and that. That's what-- this project's crazy! Mother encourages the daughter to fight!

Valerie: Why is that?

Jamie: 'Cause they don't want their daughter--'cause it makes them look bad if their daughter gets punked down. Or if their son gets punked down//

Christina: //It makes them FEEL BETTER if they fight.

Jamie: 'Cause they don't want their kids to look bad or they don't want themselves to look bad in front of people. (Tape 27, p. 13)

Another young African-American man in 7th grade identified a fourth reason for parents wanting their children to be good fighters. In Charlie's example, what his father has to pass on to him in terms of inheritance is his fighting ability.

Charlie: Oh, my parents? They'd be like, "Try the best to, knock them through the wall."

Valerie: They'd say that to you?

Charlie: Yes, my father would. I don't know what my mother would say.

Valerie: Why would he say that to you?

Charlie: Because when he came to this school, he got into a lot of--he was a bully. So he got into a lot of fights, so he won all of them. That's what he told me that.

Valerie: Does he feel like you need to fight to protect yourself?

Charlie: No, he feels like he want me to be better than him.

Valerie: You laughing? Are you making this up?

Charlie: NO! Really I'm not! It's so funny--it's funny when I hear it--something. But it's not, for real. It's so sad. (Tape 30, lines 135-157)

Every participant with whom I spoke identified, directly or indirectly, the importance of a family inheritance, a link between past and present time and past

and present generations. What this link is varies considerably. For Selena, whom I introduced earlier, carrying on the family's genetic lineage was important. For Charlie, it is carrying on the family tradition of being a winning fighter.

But what strikes Charlie as both touching and tragic at the same time is the fact that this is the legacy which his father is passing on to him. When he actually gives voice to that legacy in front of a stranger, he is ashamed and amused. Selena refuses to critique the essence of her inheritance, perhaps fearing that she will have no other way by which to define herself.

These examples provide glimpses into the power of symbolic realms and interactions. They also humble us so that when we propose to minimize or tamper with others' ways of doing, we realize that we are tapping into a live current, the social and psychological electricity which flows between and within individuals and groups. Encountering these raw symbolic realms should also encourage us to reflect upon the currents which illuminate and guide our own existence.

End Notes

1. Jamie is referring to his paternal African-American side of the family.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study attempts to define some of the structures and content of adolescent conflicted communication in an urban middle school. Adolescent conflict is not random, unprincipled, chaotic or dysfunctional. It is a fluid, shifting and varied system of interaction. It helps youth to establish social parameters of inclusion and exclusion, face, status, behavior (Maynard, 1985, p. 215) and power. While there are various subsystems of conflicted communication in operation within Walnut School, there is an identifiable dominant system which is utilized to greater or lesser degrees, by individuals.

A central premise of this research is that adolescence is largely a social construction which is affected by the placement of youth in schools and in neighborhoods. Depending upon the social, ecological and structural aspects, these settings can either facilitate or disable the participants' opportunities to question not only what is and but how it is becoming. Purely descriptive and interpretive ethnographic research endeavors often do not provide an adequate critique of institutional settings and thus end up helping people adapt solely to "what is," by helping to maintain "what is" (Simon, 1983, p. 238).

This statement has particular relevance for conflict analysis and resolution studies and programs within the

education sector. The wave of mediation programs[1] which has surged into public schools is a way of letting off some of the pressure which builds up in settings where students are often bored, lack the physical space to engage in productive sports or activities, and are placed with too many other students all experiencing the same constraints. Oftentimes, programming is engaged as a way to allow the status quo to settle back within its old parameters. One might ask, as an outcome of this research, "If the hallways are such active and creative places, how is it that classrooms are becoming even more restrictive and monotonous?"

This question leads to the second premise of this study: that the developmental aspect of adolescent conflicted communication is found in its integrity as a functioning system in its own right. It is not an imperfect, or emergent adult system, although there are elements of the adult world within it. It arises out of the interactions of a varied age range of a group of institutionalized urban youth. The participants often understand the benefits and costs of engaging in that system of conflicted communication and they realize that there are differences between the conflicts of earlier childhood and those which they are encountering from middle school onward. What some, but certainly not all participants, are aware of is the connection of that system to broader social structures.

A third primary premise is one which synthesizes the previous two: conflicted communication has the qualities and characteristics identified in the preceding chapters because it is generated by adolescents who make sense of and construct their social world in particular ways that are influenced by family, community and institution.

In a field which affords few previous research precedents where macro and micro focuses are combined to approach conflicted communication in multicultural settings, I have tried to produce a work that breathes life into broad patterns without concurrently smothering the more shadowy forms of intra- and inter-group or individual differences. The appeal of structural and functional discourse analyses, stripped of context and focused on particular isolated phenomena, became alluringly clear to me during the course of this writing.

But despite the attraction decontextualization and isolation offers, I nevertheless have attempted to make some contribution to the study of conflict along the lines advocated by more senior researchers and writers by reintegrating the study of interaction with the investigation of wider social spheres in order to understand how conflicted communication works through time and space and context to constitute features of those wider environments (Fine, 1982; Goodwin & Duranti, 1993; Maynard, 1985).

Consequently, this study presents the major finding that student conflicted communication behaviors are forms of action and are part of a relational activity which is creative yet rule-governed, contextually-situated yet culturally, historically and structurally bound. The study contributes to a greater recognition of the dialectic: (1) between the stasis, that is, the broad repetitiveness of conflict patterns and content and the dynamism in the form of myriad behavioral choices and differentiation across conflict situations and (2) between the one small conflict event in the hallway and the larger social structure. Recognition of these dialectic relationships is essential if schools and communities are to productively and non-hegemonically transform themselves, a process which can only happen from the inside out.

An ethnographic study of schooling which investigates the wider social spheres which make an impact on a system of conflicted communication must necessarily employ a multilevel approach (Ogbu, 1981a) to more adequately examine "how schools relate to the larger society of which they are a part and to the historical, political, social and economic processes within it" (Gibson, 1982, p. 25). But again, investigation via a multilevel, or, in the case of this study, a multi-influences approach with a diverse group of participants complicates the analysis, description and reporting of findings.

The conflicted communication patterns of youth remain relatively static, following a particular orbital path which is determined by the culture and context of the school, the neighborhood and the family as well as by the social fact of adolescence itself. While there is evidence of individuals opting for alternative patterns and behaviors, the majority of the youth within Walnut School conform to the established norms.

Faber (1981), in Culture and Communication, argues that the way we receive the world determines the way that we perceive the world and that whatever alters our ability to receive the world will consequently alter our ability to perceive the world. Walnut School youth have few opportunities either within the school setting or outside of it to experience different ways of perceiving the world. This is not to say that there is something wrong with the norms and forms of conflicted communication being expressed in Walnut School. They serve specific purposes which have been explored within this document, both in terms of the family and the ethnic group and the adolescent social group itself.

It is to say, however, that youths' awareness of the extent to which their behavioral responses are conditioned and patterned is oftentimes limited; thus, their options for different responses are also limited. Consequently, it is only the lucky or the extremely self-assured, self-possessed individuals who are able to explore other

possible ways of engaging in conflict--ways which are consistent with their own internal value system rather than the value system into which they are socialized.

Conflict resolution programs, predominantly mediation programs, which are proliferating at a staggering rate throughout United States' schools as well as internationally, purport to provide students with options. But little consideration is given to the appropriateness of such programs either in terms of students' lives outside of school or the critical internal re-structuring needs of the institution. This absence of a critical assessment is due in part to the lack of available literature on the interpersonal conflict systems of various groups of students and in part to the understandable eagerness of school systems to embrace anything that appears to be a quick fix for violence.

One way of addressing the lack of understanding of the manners in which school, family and neighborhood interact is to utilize the community studies approach advocated by Heath (1982, 1983). Community studies research speaks to the sort of multicontextual awareness which is necessary if schools are to serve their respective populations. The emphasis within this approach might fall upon the connections or, in some cases, the discontinuity (Macias, 1987; Ogbu, 1982) between a variety of community contexts and the school itself or the creation of caste-like groups by an institution (Ogbu, 1978).

Heath (1982) urges an increase in this type of multicontextual research. While the boundaries between home, school and community have traditionally been perceived to be impermeable, this viewpoint has been and continues to be challenged. In addition, the expectation of conformity to what is termed the "mainstream" neither can nor should be assumed. Just as different classrooms have different social cultures, so do different schools (Wexler, 1993), even those found within the same community.

One of the goals of the current study has been to examine the patterned responses to and the content of youth conflict in an attempt to re-address the notion of the mainstream by focusing on a particular inner city middle school. Just how unique this particular school is and how distinctive the adolescents who participated in this study are is unknown at the present time since the empirical bases for comparative studies of youth conflict in the United States (and elsewhere) are virtually non-existent. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there are underlying conflict commonalities which might be found in any middle school in the United States as well as differences which have to do with economics, environment and socio-cultural traditions.

Heath believes that we will be able to achieve an "image of wholeness" if we can "realize the potential of understanding the many patterns of culture represented in

communities for expanding ways of learning and reflecting knowledge, skills, and dispositions in schools" (1982, p. 53) in general. This current analysis of the conflict patterns and content of inner city middle school youth is meant to reflect one piece in the complex puzzle of conflicted communication among adolescent youth. The hope is that such analyses will enable schools to better serve students in appropriate and meaningful ways.

In addition, we educators must acknowledge the possibility that adolescents are engaging in developmentally situated, suitable and socially conditioned and modeled acts. This acknowledgement can release educators and researchers from the assumption that conflicted communication acts must be stifled through corrective procedures. It also allows the radical perspective to be re-visioned. Perhaps conflict behaviors are more than opposition or resistance to the dominant class, the mainstream culture or to school authority. Perhaps these acts are part of the social system youth both create and maintain, and perhaps that system emerges out of youth's contact with their families, in school, and the community.

Understandably, most conflict resolution efforts at the school and the community level are often contented with immediate goals such as decreasing violence and other disciplinary problems in schools so that teachers can teach ("our teachers can spend more time educating students

instead of refereeing disputes" school principal, cited in Cameron & Dupuis, 1989, p. 24). Some efforts do target further-reaching goals such as providing children with skills to live in a multicultural world (of work--is a phrase often attached as a suffix to this statement). The questions these efforts beg are, whose skills are valued and privileged? and whose social system is being explored?

But overall, the structural, socio-cultural and historical dimensions as well as the particular immediate behaviors associated with conflicted communication in a given setting are seldom explored. Once the immediate triage-type goals of violence reduction and truancy decrease are achieved, schools (and communities) are contented to not ask the question of how these goals are being attained and what children are not learning. Children are not encouraged to understand how it is they are doing what they are doing. They are encouraged, instead, to adopt a technique for modifying or for controlling what they do. Prime opportunities to explore the creation and maintenance of social systems across social realities are therefore lost.

Cameron and Dupuis (1989) discuss the idea of school climate in terms of a "mediation facilitator climate" where the setting supports open communication about conflict versus a "mediation impediment climate" which relies on authoritarian methods of social control. But even in the mediation facilitator climate the pedagogical envelope, so

to speak, is not pushed into the realm of critical education. And it may even be more difficult to raise a discussion around the more subtle manifestations of power, resistance and socio-cultural scripts in an environment where people feel themselves to be liberal facilitators as opposed to an environment where these manifestations are relatively transparent and in your face.

The implications for the utilizers of this research lies in the education sector, with teachers and administrators who are rarely schooled in understanding their own enmeshment in conflicted response systems and who traditionally view adolescents as adults in the making. Education sector personnel must capitalize on the rich possibilities for engaging students in dialogue about folk ways and means. Exploration of one's own conflict system and the systems utilized by students for particular purposes, can help broaden the cross-cultural repertoires of all.

School personnel who have acquired a great deal of intellectual knowledge but who are either unable to appreciate the uniqueness of adolescents or to use the students' social world as a learning tool are less effective educators. Seeing themselves and their students as social actors who are creating a socially valid world is liberating. Helping students to recognize the enabling aspects and to address the disabling characteristics of that social world is educating.

Dorothy St. Charles (Milwaukee, Wisconsin), acting principal of the first elementary public school to implement the Waldorf education philosophy, makes a powerful statement about the potential for schools to change students' realities.

> I see students changing. They don't come in all defensive and tough. They laugh and they smile and they joke around. They're happy. And it worries me. Because it makes them vulnerable. They have to watch their backs when they're out on the streets. They have to be defensive. I worry about what's going to happen to them. But you know what I see? I see two students: one the way he or she is in school and one the way he or she needs to be out on the street. It's like they're two different students. (Interview on National Public Radio, WFCR, April 30, 1994)

Giving youth the chances and the places to comprehend their own ways of being and doing will enhance their ability to become conscious actors rather than social marionettes whose strings are tugged by the devices of those around them with more power and status. Chances and places will also enable youth to expand the choices available to them. Rather than the ultimate resolution of conflicted communication being restricted to the polarized responses of direct physical confrontation or indirect physical avoidance, additional behavioral strategies can be generated and practiced.

Thus, in order to open up the discussions of conflict behavior, this study has aimed to contribute: (1) a detailed analysis of youth conflict, moving beyond the framing of youth conflict in purely psychological terms

into (2) a critical framework which explores some of the socio-cultural and historical as well as the structural dimensions of youth conflict. Such an analysis is intended to be a catalyst for educational transformation as well as to contribute to an understanding of behavior patterns in a multi-ethnic, mono-class setting.

The goal of subsequent research will be to identify the less obvious ethnic-specific expressions and how these expressions interface with the wider practices. Subsequent research endeavors must also address the impact of socio-economic differences on the broad norms and forms of youth conflicted communication. Indeed, Felstiner's words ring true: "If we want to get somewhere in responding effectively to disputes, it is critically important that we begin by finding out where we are" (1975, p. 705).

End Notes

1. There are approaches to conflict resolution/ transformation which have a better fit with critical theory. Locating resolution/transformation in a peace education approach is one example. Organizations such as Educators for Social Responsibility (ESR) is one such organization which is influenced by critical theory in their approach to schools.

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